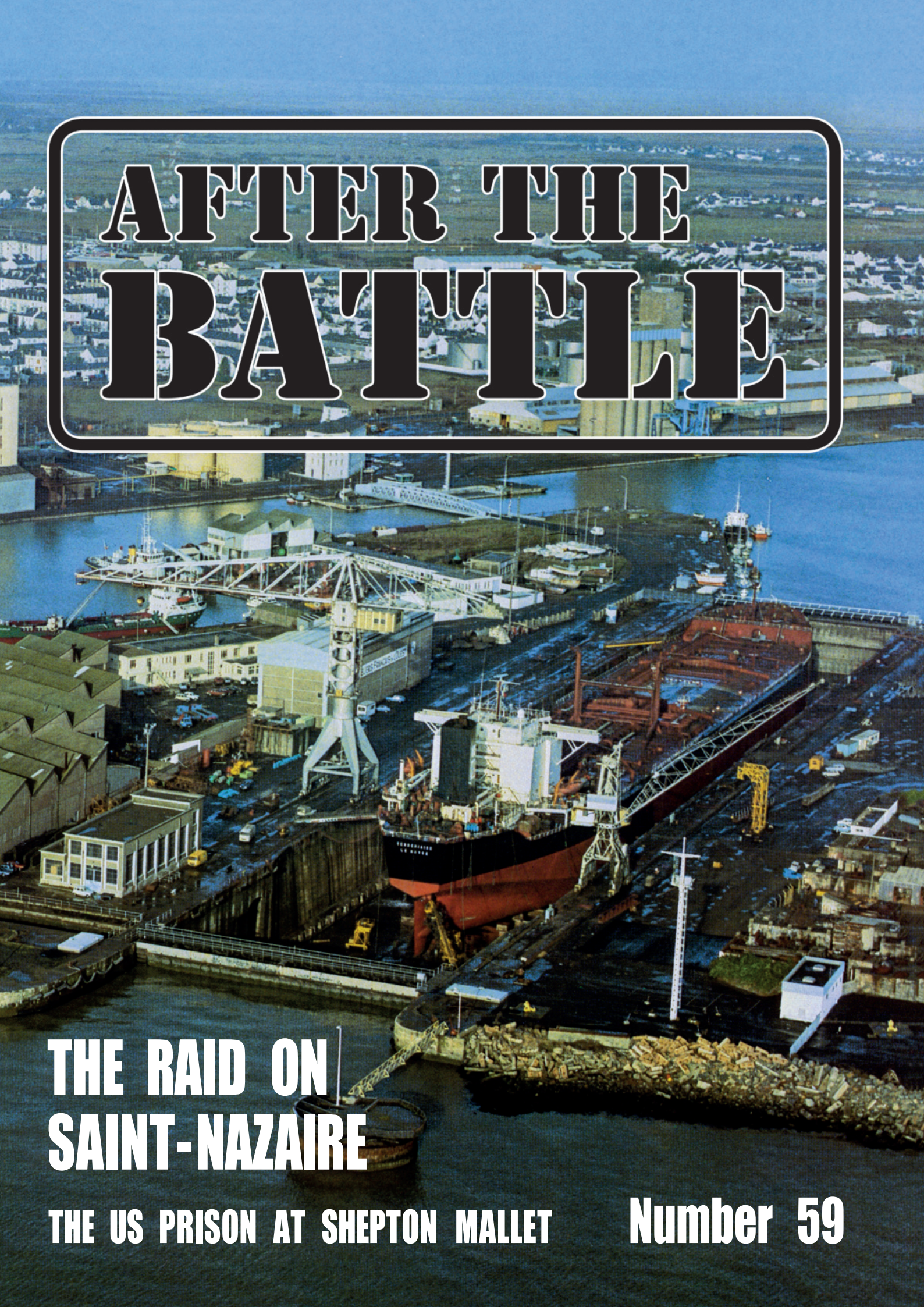
AFTER THE BATTLE



THE RAID ON SAINT-NAZAIRE

THE US PRISON AT SHEPTON MALLET

Number 59

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Front and Back Cover: The attack on Saint-Nazaire on the coast of France on March 28, 1942 has been called 'the greatest raid of all' — certainly one of the most dramatic and successful operations mounted during the war. Picture shows the Normandie dry dock rammed by HMS *Campbeltown* (front cover) and the eastern lock entrance (back cover) with the submarine basin behind. (The bunker in the foreground now houses the Écomusée (see page 24). (Photo P. Gorneg, Écomusée)

Centre Pages: The Narval Class submarine on display — the S-637 *Espadon*. (D. Macel, Écomusée)

Acknowledgements: The Saint-Nazaire attack based on *The Greatest Raid of All* by C. E. Lucas Phillips, and an extract on page 17 reproduced with acknowledgement to White Lion Publishers. The Editor is indebted to David Hale for much of the initial research into crimes committed by American servicemen in the UK. Additional information was provided by the late Dr Henry Burns, Jr, of the University of Missouri, William S. Fulton of the United States Army Judiciary, the late Professor Keith Simpson, the late Albert Pierrepoint, the Forman Archive, Stan Dyer and Bill Pyle. The extract from *Country Copper* by G. H. Totterdell included with acknowledgement to George Harrap & Company Ltd.

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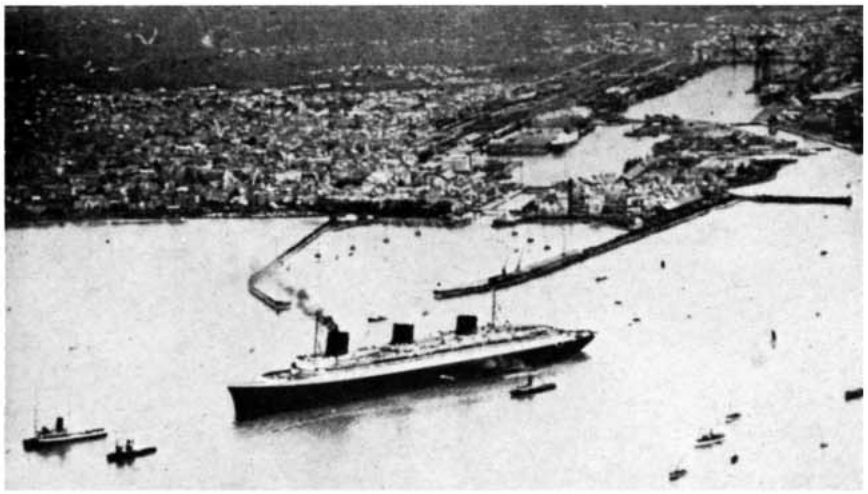
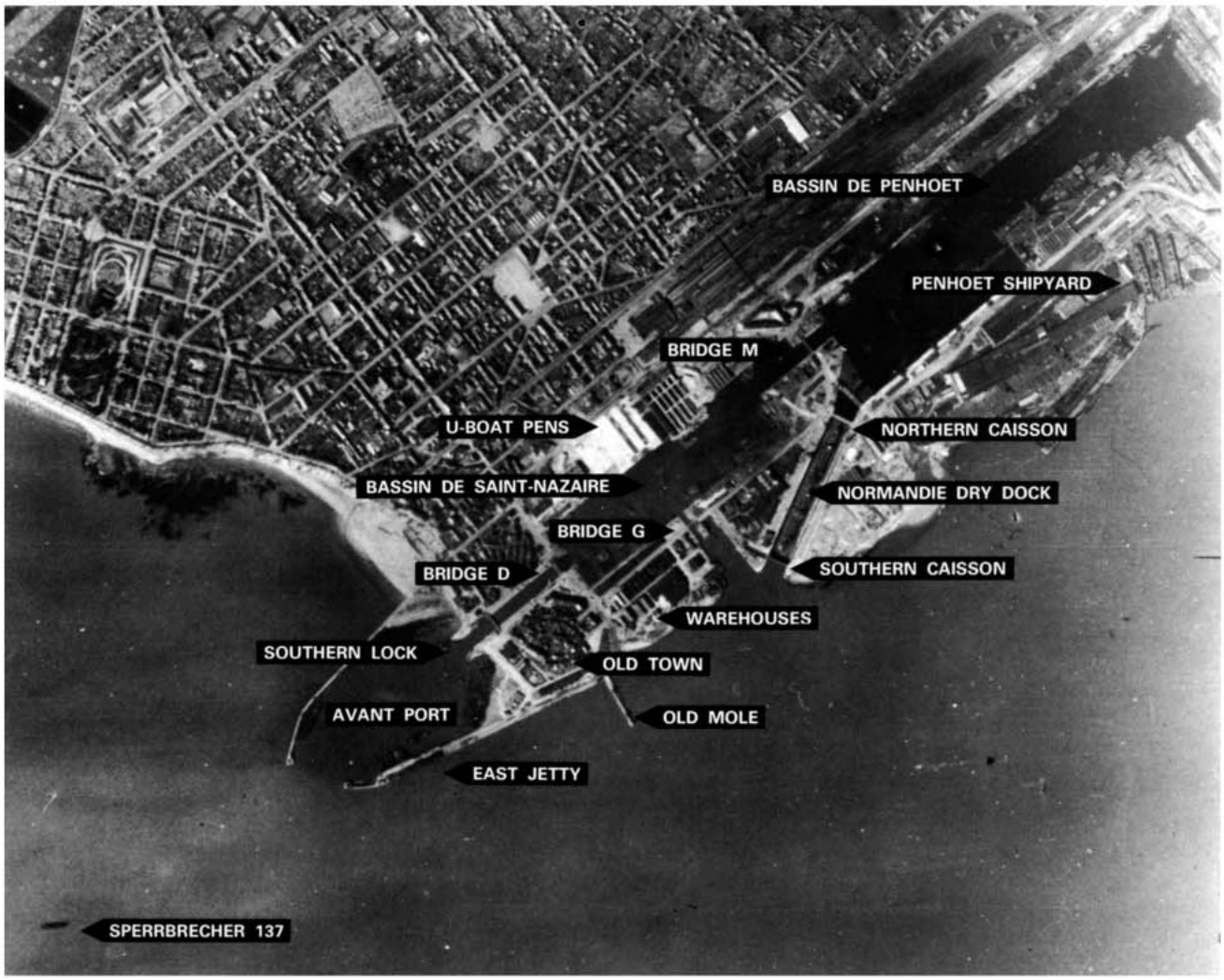
Until the age of steam, Saint-Nazaire was merely a fishing village with the inland port of Nantes, thirty-five miles up the Loire, the main centre of trade. However after the 1850s, with the introduction of large steamships, navigation up the shoaly, fast-flowing river was impossible and Saint-Nazaire on the north bank of the estuary was increasingly developed with sheltered docks, shipbuilding slipways and fitting out Bassins. Nevertheless the approach to the port was still treacherous because of extensive sandbanks (which show up light in the pre-war photo *above*) across the river mouth, and the dredged channel from the open sea lay close inshore.



The two wet docks, the Bassin de Saint-Nazaire and the Bassin de Penhoët were entered through lock gates: from the south through the Avant Port and from the east directly from the river. When the Chantiers de Saint-Nazaire Penhoët decided to build the huge transatlantic liner *Normandie* in the 1920s, a new dry dock over 1,000 feet long was constructed specifically for the purpose which also gave new access for large vessels to the inner Penhoët Bassin when used as a conventional lock. *Above:* The *Normandie* departs following her completion in 1932 and *below* dry-docked in the Forme Ecluse Joubert protected by its massive steel sliding gate.



THE RAID ON SAINT-NAZAIRE

The Forme Ecluse Joubert — the Normandie Dock — was the only dry-dock on the Atlantic seaboard able to service and repair the German battleships *Bismarck* and *Tirpitz* although its potential was only brought home to the Royal Navy after the *Bismarck* broke out into the Atlantic and sank the 'mighty *Hood*' — the largest warship afloat — almost with her first salvo. Ten months after the *Bismarck* had been sent to the bottom, an operation was mounted against Saint-Nazaire to knock out the dock and render useless as many of the port facilities as possible. Operation Chariot, which has gone down in the history of Combined Operations as 'the greatest raid of all', went in on Saturday, March 28, 1942. This picture was taken by No. 1 PRU Squadron on the previous Wednesday. (Crown Copyright via Keele University.)

On May 27, 1941 the *Bismarck*, one of Germany's two battleships, was sunk in the North Atlantic by the combined attacks of the Royal Navy and Fleet Air Arm while attempting to reach the only dry dock on the German-occupied Atlantic coast capable of berthing her at Saint-Nazaire.

Here in the French port at the entrance to the Loire estuary lay one of the largest wet docks in Europe, the Bassin de Penhoët, with an area of over 50 acres. When the French transtlantic liner *Normandie* was being built in 1928–32, a new passageway sealed with sliding lock gates called 'caissons' was constructed for her at the southern end to serve a dual purpose: for access to and from the inner basin and also as a dry dock for her maintenance. Its French name was the Forme Ecluse Joubert, more commonly known as the Normandie Dock. Its strategic value to the Kriegsmarine was that having a length of 356 metres (1,148 feet) and width of 50 metres (164 feet) it was the only dock which was large enough to take the 50,000 ton *Bismarck* and her sister ship the *Tirpitz*, each over 800 feet long and 100 feet wide.

As a potential target the value of the dry dock at Saint-Nazaire as the only service and repair base for the *Tirpitz* was appreciated all the more by the British after the *Bismarck* had been sent to the bottom, and three months after her sinking the Admiralty began casting around for a means of immobilising it. At that time the Director of Combined Operations was Sir Roger Keyes, an ideal man to give an opinion as it was he who had planned the attack against another German-held port — Zeebrugge — in 1918 and who wanted to mount a bigger and better raid along the same lines. Various suggestions were considered for landing Commandos, but to carry out any worthwhile demolitions it was realised that such a force would have to be several hundred strong, yet at Saint-Nazaire the shoals in the estuary made the approach for large vessels a hazardous operation.

When Lord Louis Mountbatten was brought in to replace Sir Roger in October 1941 he also believed that the idea of a raid from the sea was impractical, and it was not until January 1942 that the proposal to use shallow-draft craft at high water on a spring tide was mooted. Technical specialists were consulted, notably Captain W. H. Pritchard of the Royal Engineers who had already made studies of possible demolitions of the dock installations and who had amassed a bulky file on the subject which also contained detailed engineering plans of the huge Normandie dry dock caissons. If these could be destroyed or immobilised then the whole port could be denied to the *Tirpitz* as the two other sets of lock gates were not wide enough to permit her entry to the inner basin.

Each caisson, hollow to allow it to be filled with water ballast, weighed some 1,500 tonnes and slid on rollers into a recess cut in the dockside. The mechanism to wind each gate in and out was contained in two buildings on the western side. Nearby was a pumping house from where the operation to empty the dock was controlled. Destruction of any or all of these facilities would add enormously to the problem the Germans would have to face in getting the dock back in use.

The planners were very fortunate in having an almost identical dry-dock at Southampton, the King George V Dock — upon which the operation ashore could be rehearsed by the Commando teams involved.

At the same time the planners looked at what other installations were vulnerable to attack and the other wooden lock gates were added to the growing list of targets as their destruction would render the inner basin tidal, so restricting its use to the U-Boats which operated from a massive bomb-proof pen on its western side *(see After the Battle No. 55)*. Bridges giving access to the port were also included in the final breakdown which covered 24 targets: 8 lock gates, 6 machinery installations, 6 gun positions and 4 bridges.

On February 6 Mountbatten submitted the plan for Operation Chariot for approval. It was based on taking the Germans by surprise under the cover of a diversionary raid by Bomber Command. The Commando force was to be carried aboard a specially converted destroyer right up to the lock gates themselves but, instead of tying up alongside as had happened at Zeebrugge, the ship was to ram the caisson at full speed. The Commandos would then jump ashore to carry out their various tasks while explosives packed aboard the destroyer would be set off after a pre-determined interval.

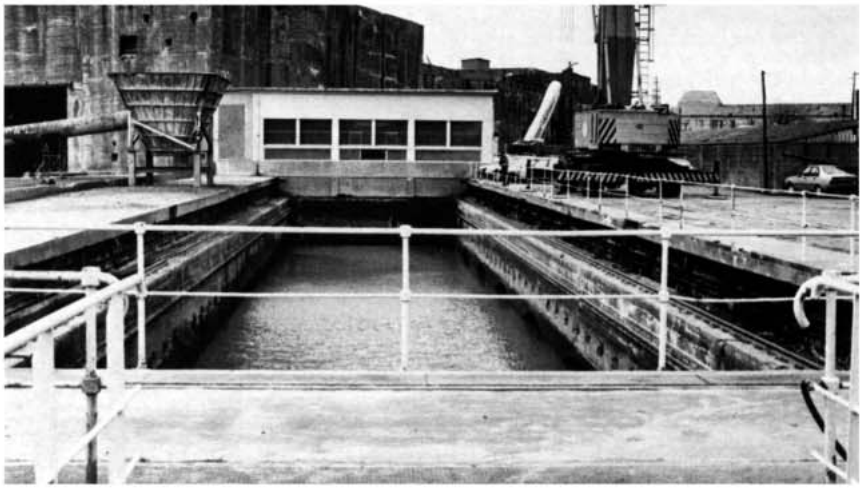
The Admiralty, already hard-pressed for warships to carry out normal operations, blanched at the deliberate sacrifice of one of them even though the end result would be in their own interests, and first suggested using a ship belonging to the Free French! Eventually one of the fifty old First World War destroyers which had been given to Britain by the USA in consideration for leases to American bases in the West Indies was made available. She was the *Buchanan*, launched in 1919 and renamed by the Royal Navy HMS *Campbeltown*.

Mountbatten wanted another destroyer to take off the men after they had carried out their tasks ashore but was told that this was out of the question so a flotilla of small wooden motor launches took its place. Only lightly armed with 20mm Oerlikons and twin Lewis machine guns, they would be hardly a match against the shore emplacements but had the advantage of small size and manoeuvrability although extra fuel tanks mounted on their decks increased their vulnerability if hit. The Navy side would be under the leadership of Commander R. E. D. Ryder.

The military force commander was to be Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Newman, a pre-war Territorial Army officer with the Essex Regiment but now commanding 2 Commando, a new type of fighting unit designed to be a highly trained, hard-hitting force able to strike across the Channel at specific targets. The Commandos first went into action on Operation Ambassador against Guernsey in July 1940 *(see After the Battle No. 32)*. The demolition parties, 90 men in all, drawn from Nos. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 12 Commandos were led by Captain William Pritchard, his intimate knowledge of the dock installations ideally fitting him for the job.

By the time the force assembled at Falmouth in March it had been boosted by an escort of two Hunt class destroyers, HMS *Atherstone* and HMS *Tynedale*, and a motor gunboat *MGB 314* to act as a headquarters for Newman and Ryder. The 16 Fairmile motor launches, four carrying torpedoes to fire against the lock gates, were 112 feet long and 20 feet wide and had a maximum speed of 18 knots. The normal complement was 12 but for the operation each would also carry 15 Commandos. A motor torpedo boat,

Above: **The massive entrance which was to be rammed by the *Cambeltown* was more than just a lock gate. The steel alone weighed 700 tonnes and its design allowed for it to be filled with 680 cubic metres of water ballast making a grand total of 1526 tonnes to be dislodged. Should the ramming fail or the caisson be found in the open position, the second most vital target was the pumping station, seen here on the left. Its destruction was entrusted to Lieutenant Stuart Chant and his party.**



The third vulnerable spot was the winding mechanism which caused the caissons to slide in and out of slots in the dockside. This is the southernmost winding building, the target of Lieutenant Smalley and his men.

The eastern lock led directly into the Bassin de Saint-Nazaire from the river and, although it had silted up to 9 ft, it could still be used by small craft. If these gates could be destroyed it would render the inner basin tidal, thus restricting its use. Each target was assigned to small, individual demolition teams, Lieutenant Woodcock and his eight-man party also being given the task of blowing the swing bridge (G) *above.*

In the event this group aboard *ML 262* never achieved their goal but delayed-action torpedoes were fired at the gates by *MTB 74*. Even if the vulnerability of dock gates had not been fully appreciated beforehand, after the raid the Germans began to build a new lock with a bomb-proof roof alongside the old, with the road crossing 'Bridge G' passing through a tunnel in the bunker.

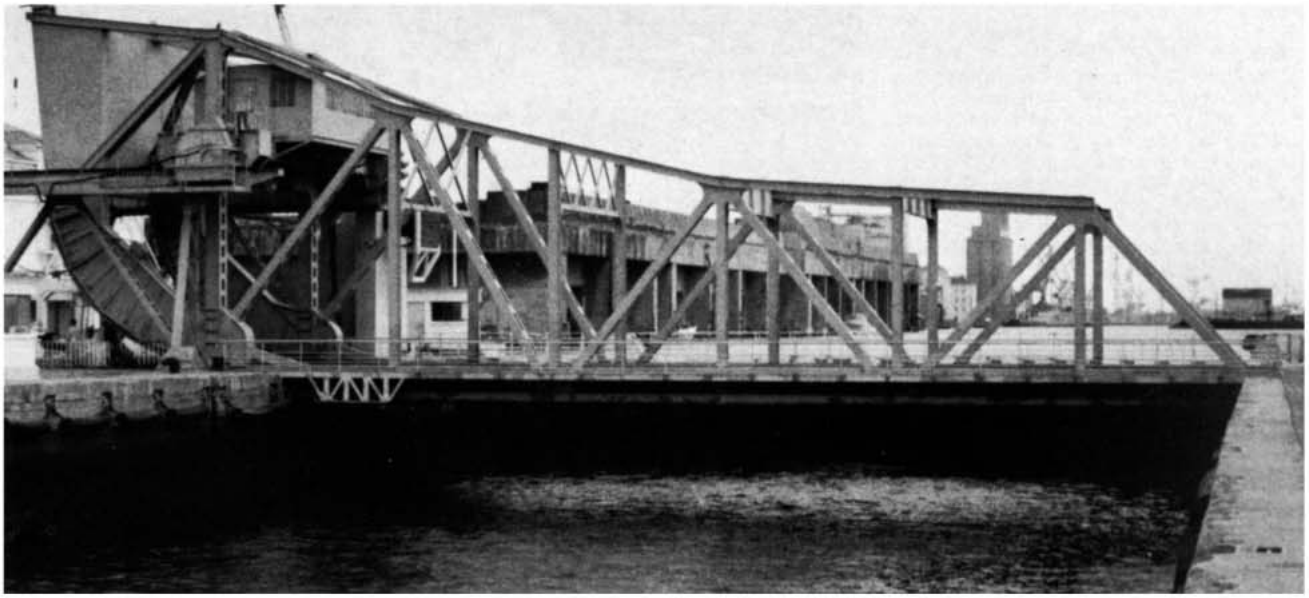
MTB 74, also joined the party with the task of entering the inner basin should the caissons be found open and firing her torpedoes at the U-Boat pens.

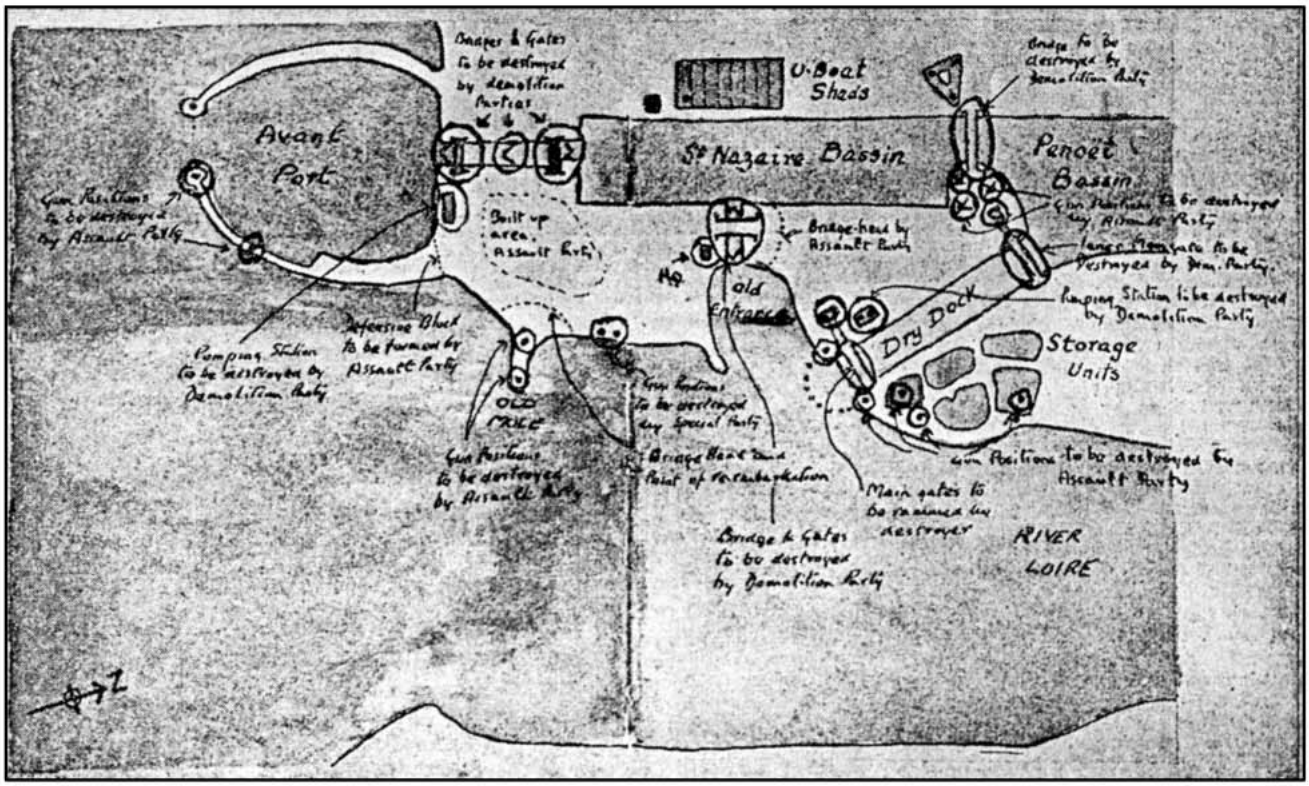
The *Campbeltown* herself had undergone radical changes, both inside and out. Her exterior silhouette was altered to give her the appearance of a German destroyer of the Möwe class, her four funnels being reduced to two of unequal size raked back. German colours would be carried to help in the deception. Practical additions were eight Oerlikons on the upper deck and a 12-pdr forard, with armour plate around the bridge and wheelhouse and along the deck to provide low fences behind which the Commandos could shield from small arms fire during the run in.

Down below she had been stripped of all unnecessary equipment, the torpedo tubes and ammunition removed and oil and water tanks pumped out to minimum requirements for a one-way voyage, to make her draw the least possible water for crossing the estuary shoals. Just one thing had been added: an explosive charge of 4¼ tons made up of 24 Mk VII depth-charges sealed in 6 chambers of steel and concrete to help withstand the ramming. The fuses were set to act after eight hours.

For operational purposes the force was divided into three, with each launch carrying a self-contained squad detailed to destroy a specific target.

Above: **The main entrance to the inner basin which housed the U-Boat pens was via the much larger southern lock. The gates at this end and the swing bridge were assigned to Captain Bradley (*ML 307*) and Lieutenant Swayne (*ML 306*) but neither launch managed to land their men. The team scheduled to attack the power station in the background also failed to get ashore.** *Below:* **The large lifting 'Bridge D', at the inner end, was given to Lieutenant Philip Walton and his four-man team. He was killed in a singlehanded attempt to lay his charges under fire.**




Avant Port
St Nazaire Basin
U-Boat Sheds
Penoet Basin
Old Entrance
Dry Dock
Storage Units
Pumping Station to be destroyed by Demolition Party
Bridge-head by Assault Party
Built up area. Assault Party
Defensive Block to be formed by Assault Party
Pumping Station to be destroyed by Demolition Party
Gun Positions to be destroyed by Special Party
Bridge-head and Point of re-embarkation
Gun Positions to be destroyed by Assault Party
Gun Positions to be destroyed by Assault Party
Main gates to be destroyed by destroyer
Bridge & Gates to be destroyed by Demolition Party
RIVER LOIRE

Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Newman was the military force commander and this is his sketch plan showing the various aspects of the operation. The fact that several of the subsidiary demolitions were not achieved does not detract from the overwhelming success of the main target for the raid: the destruction of the dry dock.

GROUP ONE

Under command of Captain E. S. Hodgson. In port ML column to land at the old mole.

ML 447. Assault: (Captain D. Birney, Lieutenant W. C. Clibborn and twelve other ranks). Destroy two gun positions on the old mole and form bridgehead at landward end.

ML 341. Assault: (Captain Hodgson, Lieutenant N. Oughtred and twelve other ranks). Destroy gun positions on east jetty and form protective post at landward end. (This team went into action in *ML 446*, a spare launch, after *ML 341* broke down on the outward journey.)

ML457. Demolition: (Lieutenant P. Walton and four other ranks). Northern lock gate and lifting bridge of southern entrance (D). *Protection:* Second Lieutenant W. H. Watson and four other ranks. Captain W. H. Pritchard and demolition control party for Group One.

ML 307. Demolition: (Captain E. W. Bradley and six other ranks). Central lock gate in the southern entrance (C).

ML 443. Demolition: (Lieutenant A. D. Wilson, Second Lieutenant P. Basset-Wilson and Lieutenant J. A. Bonvin and twelve other ranks). Boilerhouse, impounding station and hydraulic power station in old town (Z). *Protection:* Lieutenant J. B. Houghton (in *ML 307*).

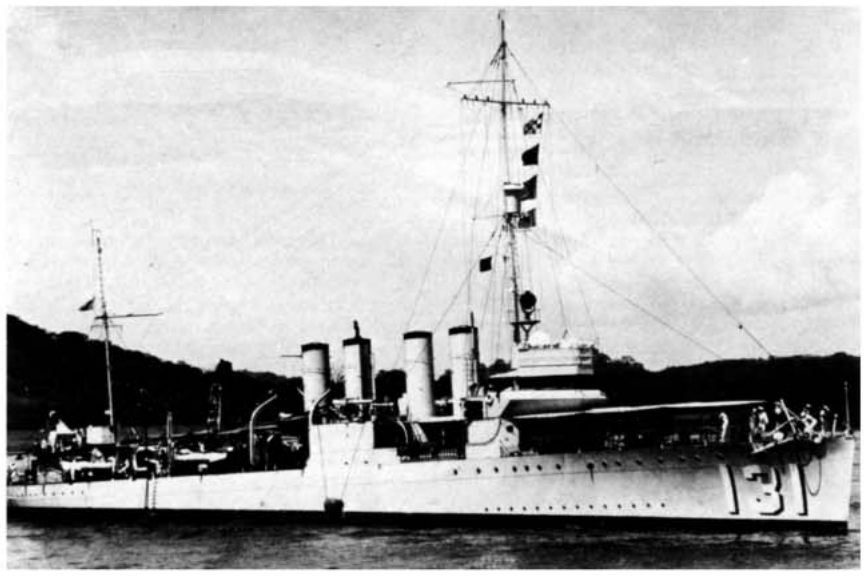
ML 306. Demolition: (Lieutenant R. O. C. Swayne and eight other ranks). The two most southerly lock gates and the swing bridge in the southern entrance (B). *Protection:* Lieutenant J. Vanderwerve and four other ranks.

GROUP TWO

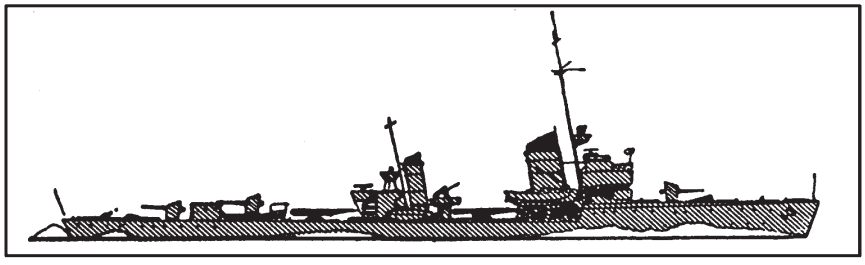
Under command of Captain M. Burn. In starboard ML column to land in the old entrance.

ML 192. Assault: (Captain M. Burn, Lieutenant T. G. Peyton and twelve other ranks). Destroy gun positions on towers adjacent to bridge (M) and form protective block. A further emergency task also detailed.

ML 262. Demolition: (Lieutenant M. Woodcock and eight other ranks). Two lock gates and the swing bridge in the old



For this task an old obsolete American destroyer was sacrificed. Here she is still the DD131 USS *Buchanan* before, as one of the 50 WWI destroyers swapped with Britain in 1940 for US bases in the Western Hemisphere, she became HMS *Campbeltown*. To hoodwink the enemy until the last possible moment, for Operation Chariot she was converted to present the silhouette of a German Wolf Class destroyer *(below)* and would fly the German colours during the approach.



entrance (G) after withdrawal of parties to the northward. *Protection:* Lieutenant R. F. Morgan and four other ranks.

ML 267. Lieutenant-Colonel Newman's headquarters party.

ML 268. Demolition: (Lieutenant H. Pennington and four other ranks). Destroy swing bridge at northern end of submarine basin (F). *Protection:* Lieutenant M. Jenkins and four other ranks.

ML 156 and *ML 177. Assault:* (Captain R. H. Hooper with Troop Sergeant-Major Haines and twenty-six other ranks). Special task party to destroy two gun positions north of old mole if occupied, silence any ships in the dry dock and come into HQ reserve.

GROUP THREE

Under command of Major W. O. Copeland, with Captain R. K. Montgomery for demolition control. In HMS *Campbeltown.*

Demolition: Lieutenant R. J. G. Burtinshaw and six other ranks to destroy the outer caisson should *Campbeltown* not succeed; Lieutenant S. W. Chant and four other ranks to destroy the pumping station (H); and Lieutenant C. J. Smalley and four other ranks to destroy the adjacent winding hut. *Protection:* Lieutenant H. G. L. Hopwood.

Demolition: Lieutenant Gerard Brett and six other ranks to destroy the inner caisson (L); and Lieutenant C. W. B. Purdon and four other ranks to destroy its adjacent winding hut. These related tasks under Lieutenant W. W. Etches. *Protection:* Lieutenant M. C. Denison.

Assault: (Lieutenant J. Roderick, Lieutenant J. Stutchbury and twelve other ranks). Destroy four gun positions immediately east of outer caisson, eliminate any guards in the area of the underground oil tanks and form protective block; drop incendiaries down ventilators of oil tanks if opportunity offers.

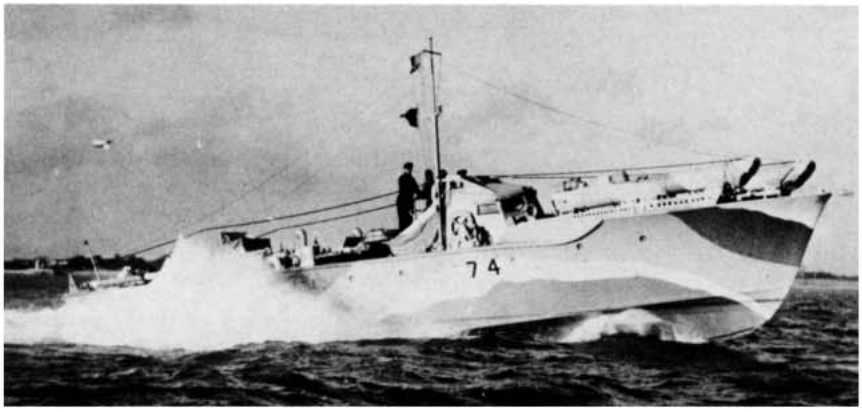
Assault: (Captain D. Roy, Lieutenant J. D. Proctor and twelve other ranks). Destroy gun positions on roof of pumping house, form bridgehead at bridge (G) to cover withdrawal of parties to the northward and engage any hostile vessels in submarine basin.

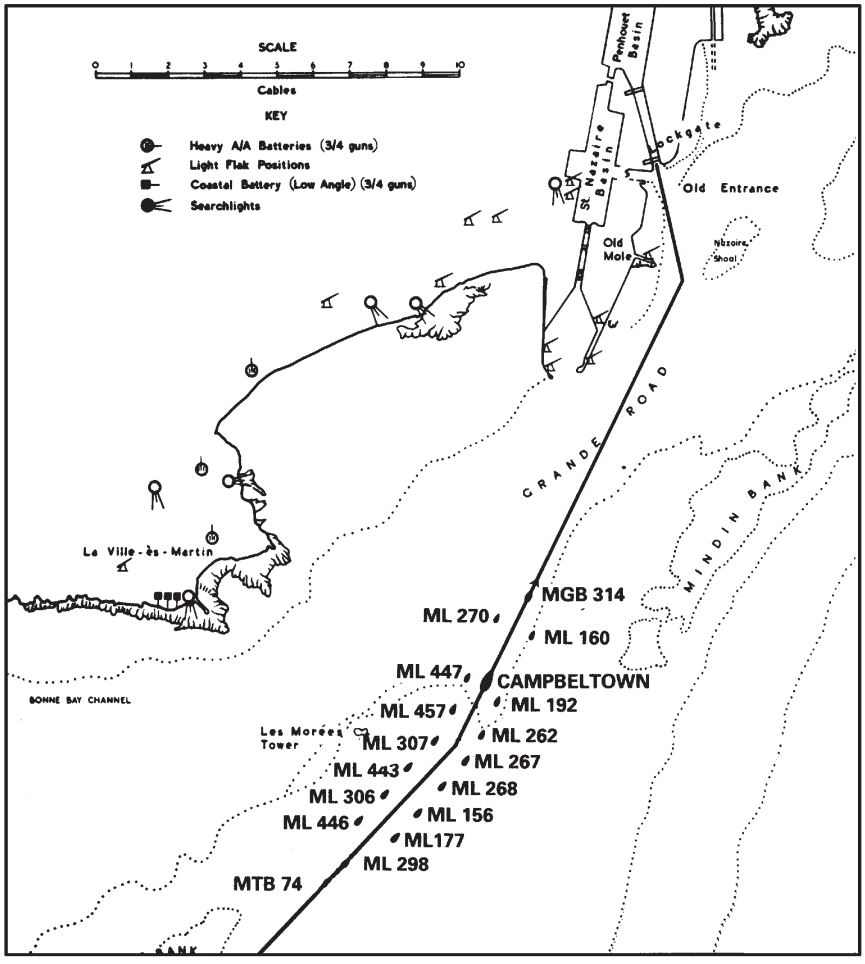
Leading the convoy would be *MGB 314* with HMS *Campbeltown* astern and *ML 270* and *ML 160* with their torpedoes on either side.

All told the strength was 611 men: 345 naval officers and ratings and 257 Commandos, a four-man medical team, three liaison officers and two members from the Press.

The run-up to Saint-Nazaire. Shortly before the flotilla entered the estuary of the Loire it passed the ghostly outline of the *Lancastria,* the wrecked troopship bombed in June 1940 with horrific loss of life. It was a sobering moment as the little ships lined up for the impending battle.

Above: **The Fairmile motor launch, typified here by *ML 145.* Built of wood the launches provided scant protection for the Commandos aboard and had little chance of survival after direct hits from large calibre guns and, of the sixteen MLs that set out from Falmouth, only two managed to land their men more or less intact.** *Below:* **Sub-Lieutenant 'Micky' Wynn torpedoed the eastern lock gates from *MTB 74.* (IWM)**





The check-point for Commander Stephen Beattie on the armour-plated helm of the *Campbeltown* was the lighthouse on the end of the old mole. From there it was just 500 yards to the caisson. (Aerofilms)

The Attack

The raiding force set sail from Falmouth shortly after 2.00 p.m. on Thursday, March 26, protected by an air umbrella of Spitfires, taking a wide route to the west to keep well away from France in order to approach Saint-Nazaire from the south-west. There was one awkward moment early on Friday morning when a U-Boat was spotted on the surface. HMS *Tynedale*, one of the escorts, went to investigate flying German colours until she came within range when the White Ensign was run up. The first salvo straddled the submarine which crash-dived and although she reported the presence of three British destroyers, made no mention of the launches. That evening *ML 341* had engine trouble and the occupants were transferred to the spare launch *ML 446*.

At 8.00 p.m., 75 miles from Saint-Nazaire, the two escort destroyers broke off and the convoy took up its attack formation (see diagram page 5). Two hours later a light ahead from the submarine *Sturgeon* confirmed that they were on course. There were now just 40 miles to go.

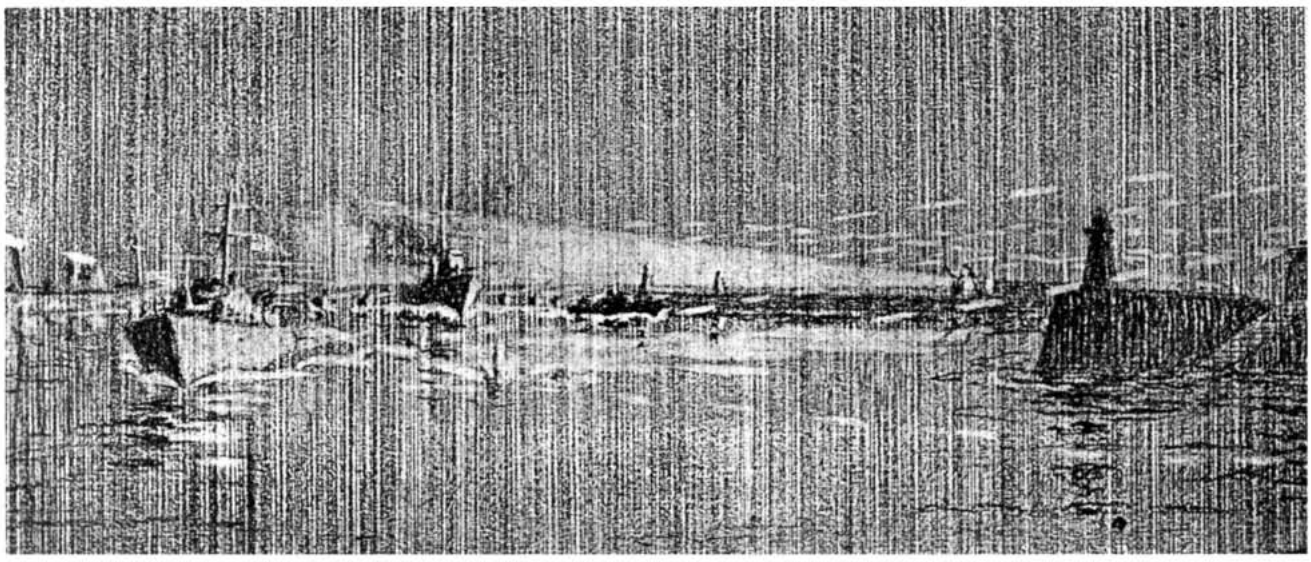
The column, nearly a mile long, was led by the gunboat with Ryder and Newman aboard. The *Campbeltown* followed some 500 yards astern, the fuses to the charges in her bowels already activated and due to explode at 7.00 a.m. the next morning. At midnight the crews came to action stations.

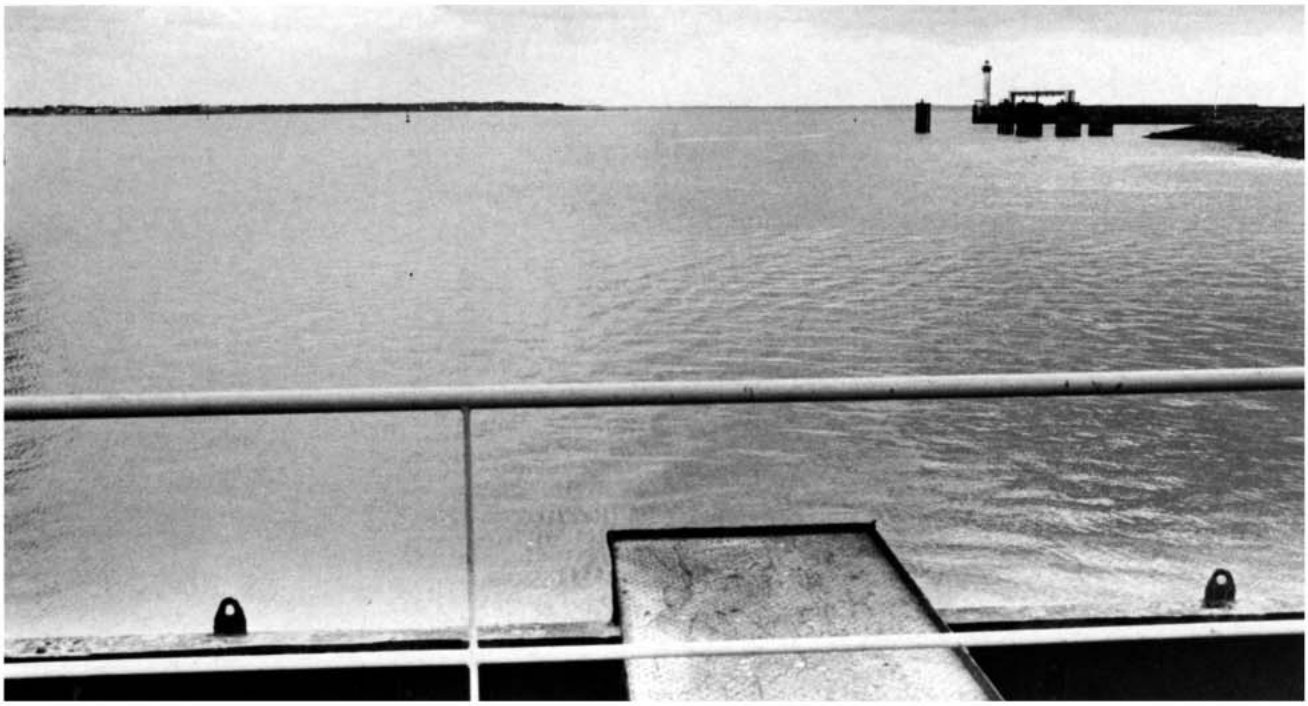
Ashore, the diversionary bombing raid had gone ahead at 11.30 p.m. but, because of the strict instructions to avoid civilian casualties in the town, the aircraft had bombed singly, one at a time. The RAF could only provide 35 Whitleys for the attack and their crews were not told the true reason for the operation, only that 'a night operation by naval and military forces' had been planned. Consequently instead of diverting German attention from the sea, the odd behaviour of the aircraft, with some not bombing at all having failed to identify their strict targets at the north end of the docks, had actually aroused the suspicions of the anti-aircraft commander, Kapitän zur See C. C. Mecke, who signalled to the Wehrmacht at midnight: 'The conduct of the enemy aircraft is inexplicable and indicates suspicion of parachute landings.' When reports came in of the sighting of a force of small vessels proceeding up the river at 1.20 a.m., Mecke put out a warning: 'Beware landing . . . '

Five minutes earlier the commander of the coastal artillery, Korvettenkapitän Dieckmann, had issued an order to his batteries to stand by to attack naval targets, and the anti-aircraft defences switched to their dual rôle of shore defence.

At 1.22 a.m. on Saturday morning a searchlight illuminated the column, which

Into the valley of death rode the six hundred. Commander Bob Ryder, the naval commander, leading the force in his 'flagship' *MGB 314*, drew this illustration of the scene as he looked behind him with the *Campbeltown* in the centre about to pass the mole.





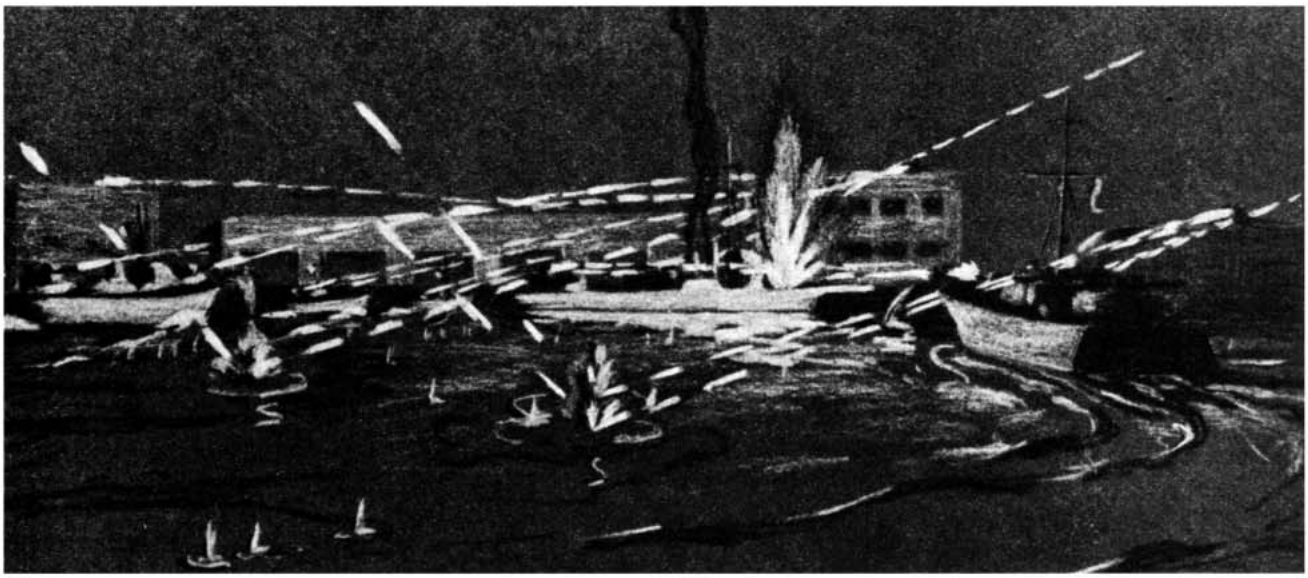
This photo is taken from the centre of the caisson looking out to sea with the mole and lighthouse on the right. One must now try to picture this same scene that night, the river lit with searchlights and tracer as both sides blazed away during the final few seconds, with the *Campbeltown* bearing down towards this spot.

now had less than two miles to run to the docks, and two shore stations challenged the ships by signal lamp. This move had been foreseen by Commander Ryder who replied in German: 'Proceeding up harbour in accordance with orders.' Replying in the same vein to the second station, several of the searchlights were doused, and when a few shots were fired by one of the nervous guns the appropriate signal was made for ships being fired on by friendly forces.

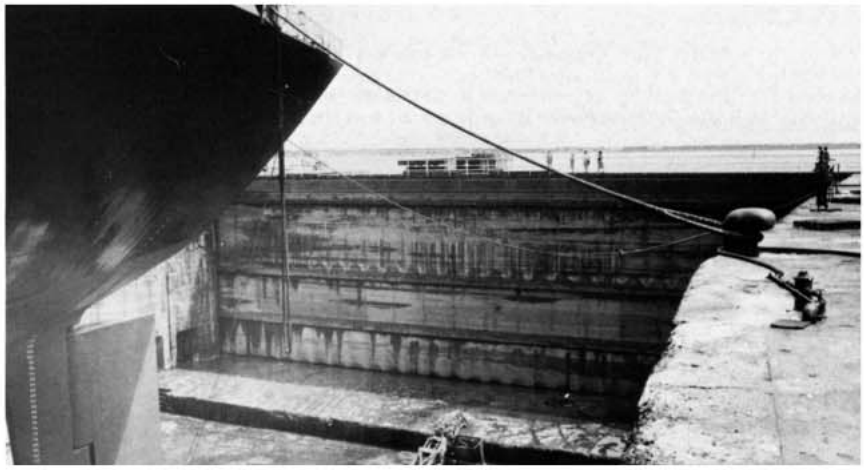
The exchange of signals had bought precious time and distance. There was now just a mile to run — six minutes on the clock. On the *Campbeltown* Lieutenant-Commander Stephen Beattie gave orders to run down the German colours and break out the White Ensign. At the same time the launches pulled up their own Ensigns: the battle was on.

Then came the signal to open fire. The eight 20mms and 12-pdr on the *Campbeltown* were augmented by an unusual weapon for a destroyer, 3-inch mortars mounted on the deck up front, and as they opened up they were joined by the Oerlikons and Hotchkiss guns on the launches and Brens manned by the Commandos. Tracer streamed ashore from where it was answered by guns of all calibres. Commander Ryder later recorded that: 'It is difficult to describe the fury of the attack that was let loose on either side,' as the opposing forces hammered away at each other, the little ships now fully illuminated in the glare of searchlights. It was a sight never to be forgotten. Colonel Newman, looking back from the gunboat in the lead, saw the *Campbeltown* 'alive with bursting shells' as the Germans concentrated their fire on her. Aboard, her captain, having increased speed before the action opened, was now heading full steam for the lock gates. Blinded by the searchlights, and with men now falling from the hail of steel. Beattie, standing silhouetted in the wheelhouse, concentrated intently on the view ahead as he attempted to pierce the glare. For the last thousand yards the destroyer would have to run alongside the outer arm of the Avant Port and past the old mole before the dry dock would be visible and his check-point for the run-up was to be the lighthouse on the end of the mole. Fortunately a searchlight illuminated this for a second as it swept across the water, enabling Beattie to correct his aim. With point-blank gunfire sweeping her decks, casualties mounted. Now, with two hundred yards to go, the destroyer was making twenty knots and Beattie could just make out the black line of the caisson dead ahead. Every man alive braced themselves for the impact. The *Campbeltown* ploughed through the protecting steel anti-torpedo net and at 1.34 a.m. she smashed into the gate, rearing up and tearing the bottom out of her bows for forty feet.

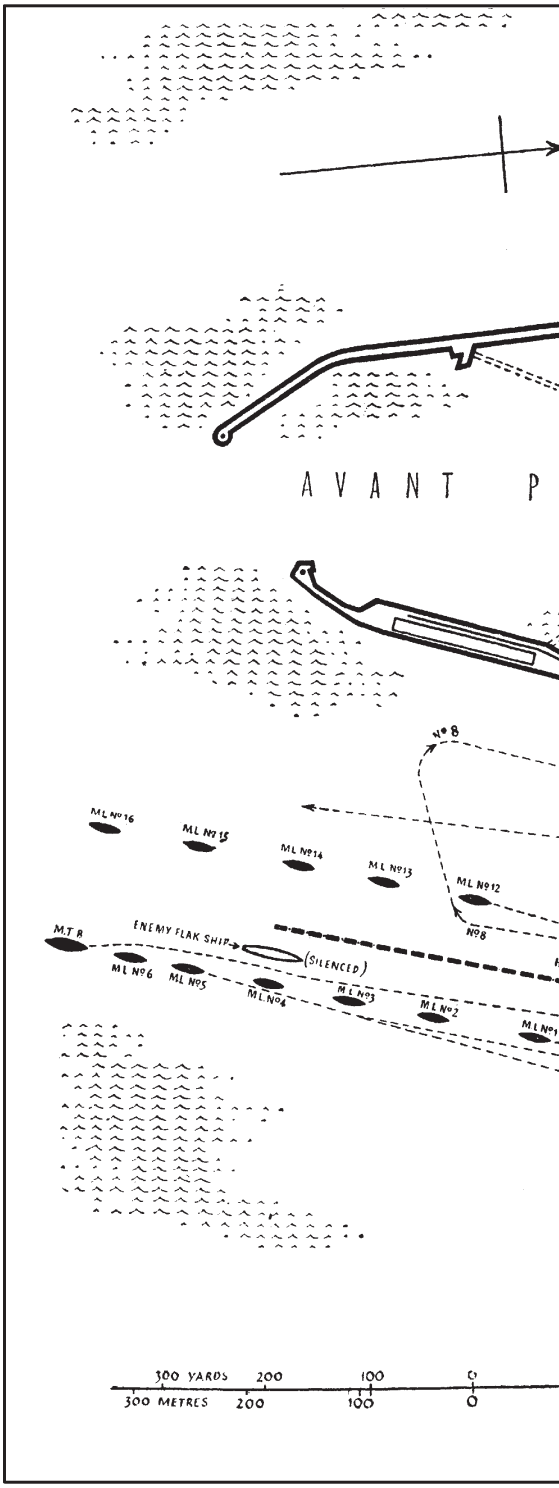
Commander Ryder's impression of the moment she hit the caisson. His MGB is on the right, with the submarine pens and pumping station in the background. On the left MLs are attempting to reach the eastern entrance.



The Normandie dock was empty on that Saturday night as two merchant vessels were dry-docked undergoing repairs. As can be seen in this shot taken as soon as it was light, the bows of the destroyer have been peeled back like a sardine can but the huge caisson itself is undamaged.



We of course know what the German standing nonchalantly on the bow does not know: that he is standing on top of five tons of explosive with the seconds, and possibly his life, ticking away beneath his feet. When the *Campbeltown* finally blew up the caisson was swept from its mountings by the combined effect of the explosion and pressure of sea water. Both the outer and inner caissons had been built by MAN in Germany and the same engineer responsible for the original construction was brought back to Saint-Nazaire. Although the Germans never got the dry dock working again, Ingenieur Kessel supervised the fabrication of a new caisson in Germany after the war. Meanwhile the northern caisson was switched to the southern end and brought back into service in November 1947. The new MAN gate was then installed at the inner end and was working by April 1948, a Liberty ship being the first vessel to use the dock again. We visited Saint-Nazaire twice to complete this story. On our first visit the dock was full of water but subsequently Jean Paul Pallud was lucky to find it empty, achieving this nice comparison with a huge methane tanker, *Ramdane Abane*, in position.



Firmly wedged on the caisson, the fo'c'sle actually projected over the top; those of the Commando assault and demolition parties still unwounded began scrambling over the bows and down scaling ladders to the dock. German fire concentrated on the battered ship, now a helpless target. Down below the sea-cocks were opened to scuttle the ship to make sure the Germans would have no chance of removing her before she exploded. As she settled by the stern, Commander Beattie began to evacuate his crew via the gunboat, which Lieutenant Curtis had brought to the old lock entrance a few yards to the west, and on *ML 177* which had just landed her assault party.

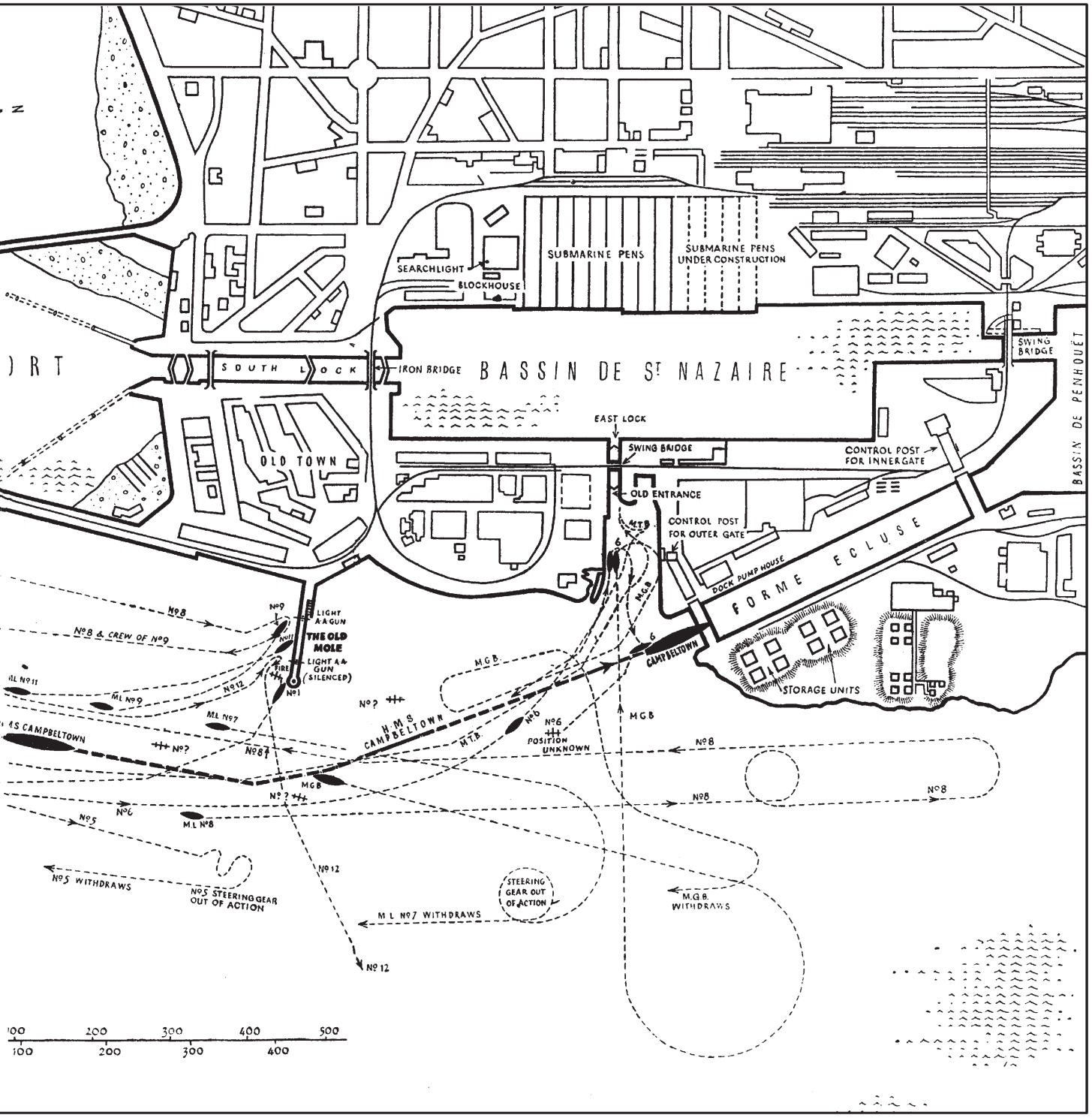
As the *Campbeltown* Commandos streamed ashore, suffering further casualties in the process, the motor launches approached their landing places: the old mole for the port column and the old eastern lock entrance, 400 yards to the north near the *Campbeltown*, for the starboard column. However, with no armoured protection the little vessels suffered grievously in the run-up. *ML 192*, receiving a direct hit off the mole, careered across the left-hand line of vessels to smash into the jetty, only five of her Commandos surviving.

ML 262, having first tried to put her men ashore on the upstream side of the old entrance, came under 20mm fire and in attempting a new landing on the other side of the entrance was caught in heavy fire. With nearly all aboard either dead or dying, the launch on fire with guns knocked out, the survivors were forced to abandon ship.

Behind came *ML 267*. Like *ML 262* she managed to land her party only to have to re-embark them in the face of murderous fire. Manoeuvring off the old entrance she was set on fire and had to be abandoned, only three of the eleven Commandos on board surviving.

ML 268 was hit while still offshore, the fuel tanks exploding, sending burning petrol cascading across the water. Only two Commandos managed to reach the shore, the others either drowning or being caught in the blazing fuel.

The torpedo-armed *ML 156* had been hit early in the battle, the steering and one engine put out of action. An attempt was made to torpedo *Sperrbrecher 137*, a heavily-armed minesweeper anchored off the Avant Port, which had been targetted from aerial photographs, before the battered vessel with



The mêlée in the river as published for public consumption during the war. For security reasons, the real pennant numbers of the vessels have not been given, yet it still gives a fairly accurate impression of the confused action which took place.

dead and wounded aboard was forced to withdraw.

The last launch in the starboard column was *ML 177*. Somehow surviving the maelstrom of gunfire and the burning and exploding vessels careering out of control, she managed to successfully land her troops alongside the old entrance, taking off as we have seen the crew of the *Campbeltown*.

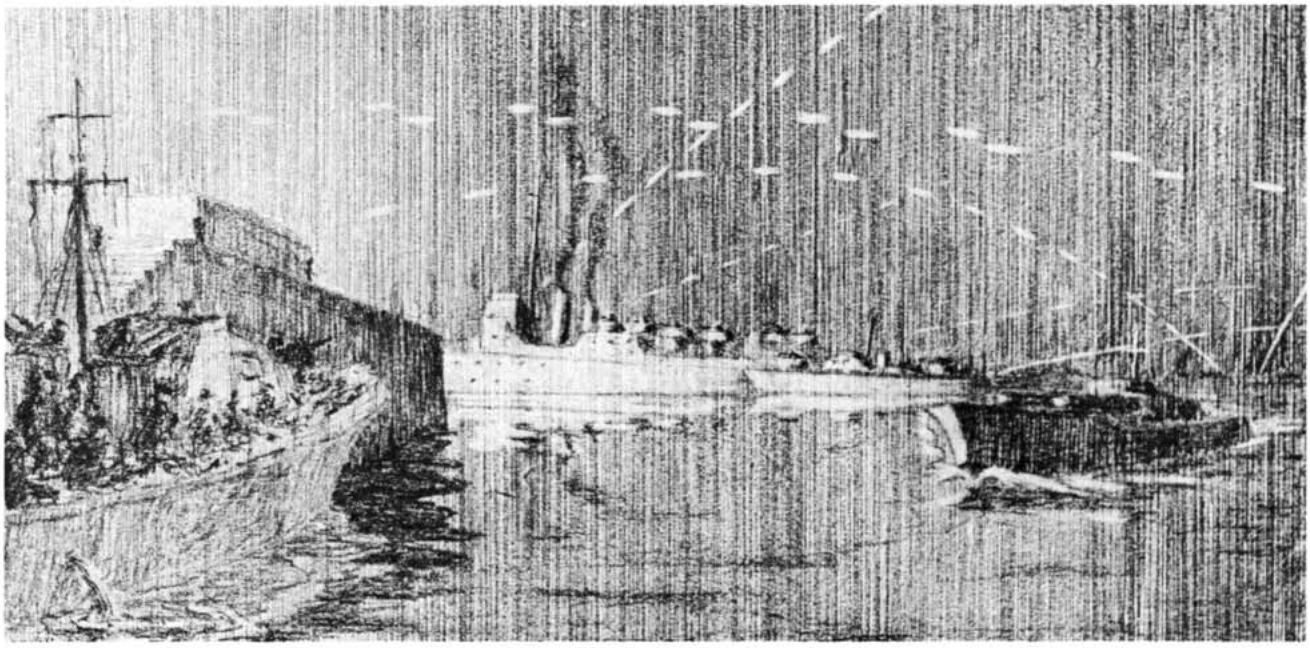
The line of launches on the port side had the old mole as their landing point — a stone structure about 25 feet above the water level with the only access via a ramp on the upstream side. The mole itself was protected by a 20mm cannon in a concrete emplacement with another at the base of the mole. Until the defences could be eliminated any attempt at landing would be suicidal, with the added danger of grenades being tossed into the launches as they came alongside.

ML 270 in the lead had her steering knocked out and was a helpless target until she managed to withdraw. Behind came *ML 447* but several of those aboard were killed before she reached the mole. There she was beaten back by small arms fire and grenades, set on fire, and had to be abandoned.

The next launch, *ML 457*, although suffering casualties, managed to reach the ramp and successfully landed her troops, who immediately set about their tasks ashore.

Although *ML 307* also reached the mole she overshot the ramp in the confusion and hit an underwater obstruction. She was carrying a lightly-armed demolition party and, lacking the fire-power to force a landing, reluctantly had to withdraw. The following three launches, *ML 443*, *ML 306* and *ML 446* also failed to put their men ashore due to the ferocity of the defences.

The other torpedo-armed vessel, *ML 160*, had no troops aboard but was given a free-roving duty to attack any German ship that posed a threat and give supporting fire to the *Campbeltown*. Apart from giving covering fire she also fired her torpedoes at a ship which her crew believed to be the *Sperrbrecher 137*.



Having just managed to land her Commandos, *ML 177* has now pulled alongside *Campbeltown* to take off her crew. Commander Ryder is aboard *MGB 314* on the left in the eastern entrance while Lieutenant Wynn comes in towards the lock gates in his motor torpedo boat. Another sketch by Commander Ryder.

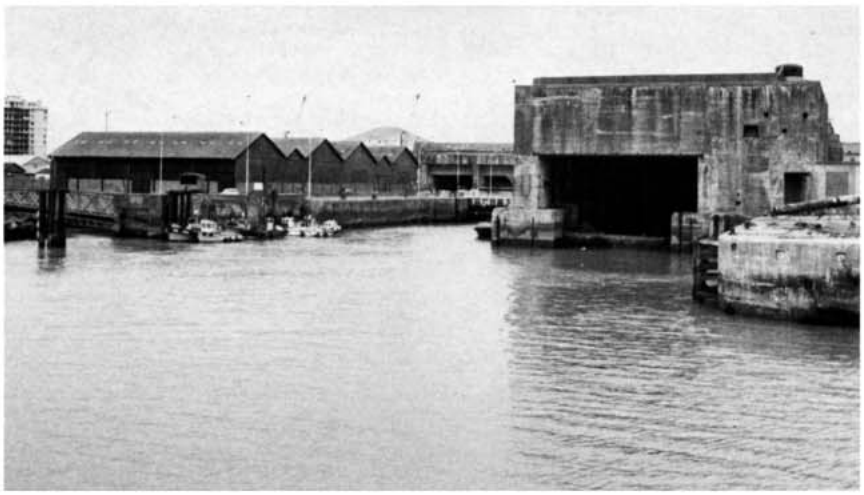
Ashore

Seven parties of Commandos, all with unblackened faces and white blancoed webbing to aid identification, reached dry land from the destroyer. They had rehearsed their individual duties over and over again and they now sallied forth into the dock area to carry out their demolitions.

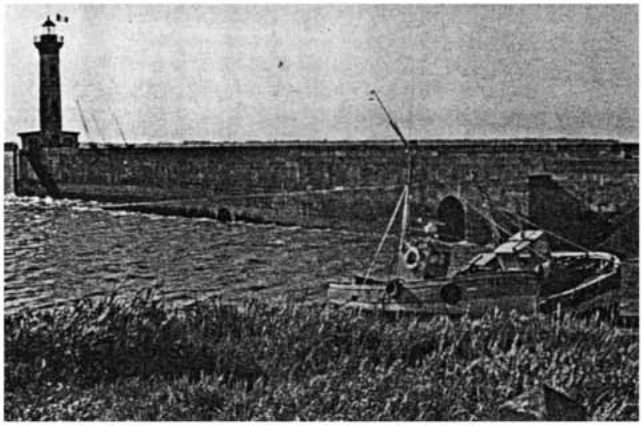
The elimination of the German gun positions in the vicinity was an urgent priority and Lieutenant Roderick's party set to with gusto, wiping out and destroying four emplacements in the next twenty minutes.

The other assault team under Captain Roy had the objective of the guns on the roof of the pumping house. These they successfully blew up before going on to form a bridgehead at bridge G beside the old entrance to hold this open for the withdrawal of the demolition parties.

Meanwhile these groups were setting about their own individual tasks. Probably the most daunting was that of Lieutenant Chant's party, who had to destroy the huge pumping station. Already wounded before he got off the *Campbeltown*, Lieutenant Chant nevertheless pressed on straight for the entrance to the building. Finding it sealed by a steel door, this was promptly blown open by a magnetic charge. Bursting inside with only torches for light, they began



It is difficult to imagine the sights and sounds which once echoed around these limpid waters . . . the deafening noise of battle . . . the smell of burning oil and cordite . . . the turmoil . . . and the carnage. The eastern entrance today looking from where the *Campbeltown* once lay. The old lock entrance is to the left of the later bunker.



Left: **The other landing position was the mole but as can be seen there were two gun positions directly on its top, and any small craft pulling alongside would be at the mercy of grenades lobbed down onto them. Nevertheless *ML 457* managed to put her men ashore here.** *Right:* **Today it is a place of bitter memory, this picture being taken by one of those that returned, Patrick St. G. Barry (*ML 307*), when the St Nazaire Society went back in force on the 40th anniversary in 1982.**

As daylight dawned over the port, German Kriegsberichter were out reporting and filming the triumphs and the tragedies of the night's battle. This sergeant is believed to be George Ide, Royal Corps of Signals, and member of No. 5 Commando under Lieutenant Robert Burtinshaw who also lost his life. (Bundesarchiv)

their descent to the impeller pumps in their chamber forty feet below ground. Having practised the operation blindfolded on identical plant serving the King George V dock at Southampton, they placed their specially-prepared charges as planned. Once the fuzes had been set they had just ninety seconds to climb back up the stairs and get clear. They had no sooner taken cover than the charges detonated with a roar, which although muffled underground, could be heard clearly over the entire battleground.

Meanwhile Lieutenant Smalley with four men had successfully placed charges in the winding hut, leaving it in ruins.

Lieutenant Burtinshaw led a back-up squad whose job it was to destroy the huge outer caisson with hand-placed charges should the *Campbeltown* fail in her mission. As this deed had been successfully accomplished, his team joined that of Lieutenant Brett, who had a similar job to do on the caisson at the other end of the dock. Working exposed to everything the Germans could throw at them, theirs was perhaps the most hazardous task of all and Brett was hit in both legs before they had started work. This operation had also been rehearsed on the King George V dock, but at Saint-Nazaire it was found that the surface had been covered with a wood decking topped with gritted tar. The inspection hatch to the inside of the caisson just would not budge in spite of efforts to blow it open, so the internal charges had to be omitted. Twelve 18-lb charges were secured underwater against the northern side (the dry dock was empty at the time of the attack) with the hope that at least the massive caisson might be sufficiently damaged, if not breached. The charges were fired with a deafening boom, sending up a huge spout of water. Out of the small party seven men had been killed including Lieutenant Burtinshaw.

The final demolition came when Lieutenant Purdon pulled the pins on the charges placed by his men in the adjacent winding building.

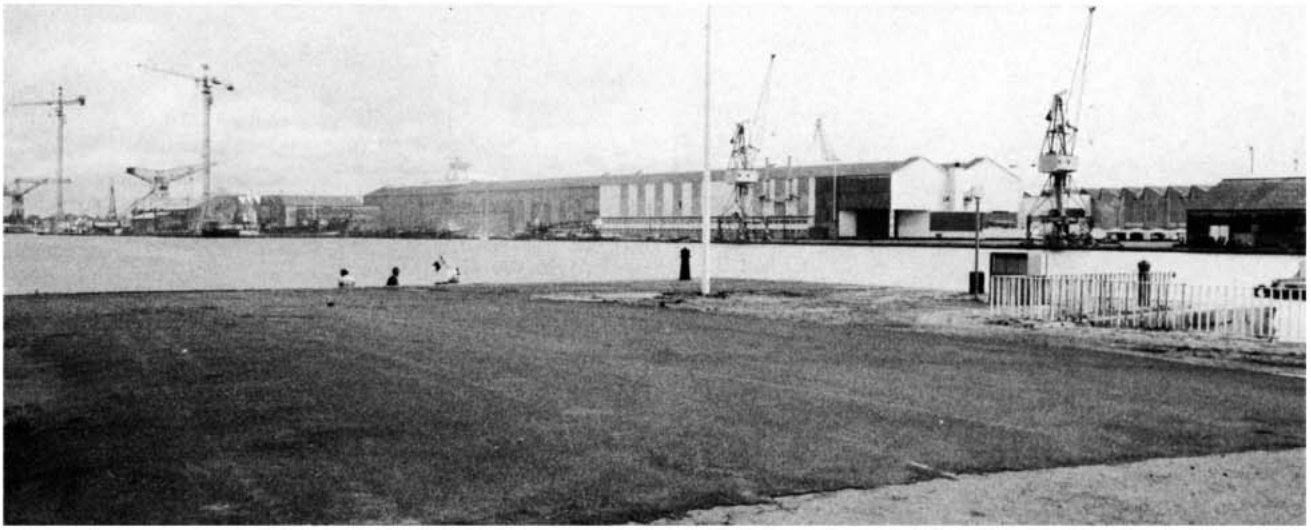
Within half an hour all the Commandos' main objectives had been accomplished under intense fire and, even if the *Campbeltown* failed to explode, the dock would now be unusable for many months to come.

The withdrawal route now lay back towards the old lock entrance where Captain Roy was holding the swing bridge. Nearby Colonel Newman had established his shore HQ although he had been unable to make wireless contact with Commander Ryder who remained on *MGB 314*, under withering fire from all directions. On the exposed position behind the bow pom-pom, with no gunshield, Able Seaman Bill Savage fought courageously in trying to knock out the German positions around the mole and successfully silenced the emplacement on the mole itself. (Mortally wounded, he was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross — one of the five awarded for exploits on Operation Chariot.) Repeatedly hit by fire from all directions, his decks loaded with

The winding hut at the northern end of the Normandie dock, blown by Lieutenant Corran Purdon and his men. (Bundesarchiv)

Above and bottom: **A fight to the death on Quai Minéralier. This spot is a long way from the landing places: up beyond the northern end of the submarine basin beside the Bassin de Penhoët. Most probably men of the 5 Commando party led by Lieutenant Burtinshaw, they fought a last-ditch battle here on the far side of Bridge M. (Bundesarchiv)**

He paid the price, his mission almost accomplished. We believe this is Sergeant Robert Beveridge who wears the crossed fighting knife symbol of 5 Commando. Having placed his charges, he has been hit before he could fire them.



Reinforcements poured into the town, the troops sealing off all the exit roads and beginning a systematic search to root out the British Commandos. *Left:* **These well-equipped sailors are marching into the warehouse area; scene of much of the last-ditch fighting during the night. (Bundesarchiv)** *Right:* **As the war progressed Saint-Nazaire received a fearful pounding from Allied bombers trying to knock out the U-Boat bunker, and much of the town, especially the port area and the old town, was completely laid waste. All was destroyed . . . except that is for the submarine pen!**

wounded, with no one left to man the guns, and with both embarkation points in enemy hands, in the end very reluctantly Commander Ryder had to make the decision to withdraw to save what men he could.

Whereas the *Campbeltown* Commandos had achieved much, few of the launch-borne troops had even reached dry land. In the port column, as we have seen, only *ML 457* made it to the mole to put her men ashore. They comprised Lieutenant Walton whose target was the northern lock gate and the large lifting bridge just alongside, and Captain Bill Pritchard, the explosives expert for the entire operation who had carefully designed all the different charges to be carried, including those installed in the *Campbeltown*. Protecting the lightly armed demolition men were Second Lieutenant Watson and four other ranks. Having split up, Pritchard reached the bridge area first and, calling for two 5-lb charges, promptly tied them to two ships moored at the southern end of the Bassin de Saint-Nazaire. Having successfully opened the proceedings with this impromptu act, Pritchard set out with Corporal Maclagan to inspect the small bridge near the southern lock gates where he hoped to meet one of the other parties. As none had yet arrived, he decided to move on to inspect the power station but on the way back to bridge D at the northern end of the lock ran straight into a German who brought him down with a bayonet thrust. Although the German was immediately riddled by Maclagan, Pritchard had been mortally wounded. Making his way back to the quayside, Corporal Maclagan still found no one at the bridge . . . only a dead body — that of Lieutenant Walton — who had been killed while heroically trying to lay his charges on the bridge under direct fire.

By now the southern end of the dockyard was the scene of many small skirmishes as the hundred or so Commandos in the area began fighting their way towards Colonel Newman's command post. The sound of the demolitions going off at various points of the compass was reassuring and, as yet, those who had gone ashore had no idea that all the launches had either been driven back or destroyed. The embarkation was supposed to take place from the mole but, when Newman reconnoitred the river, all he found was a scene of utter destruction. Burned out hulks of the launches drifted aimlessly in an inferno of flames with smoke, searchlights and shell bursts intermingling to create a scene out of Hell. It was clear that there was no hope of escape that way.

This party moves down the old Rue du Four de Marsain towards the swing bridge over the southern lock to cross into the old town. The power station, near where Captain Pritchard was killed, can be seen in the left background. (Bundesarchiv)

When the town was rebuilt after the war some streets were completely re-aligned. Thus whereas the old street met the bridge at a 45 degree angle, the new Boulevard de Verdun is almost straight on.

The last round-up. In ones and twos, some walking, some wounded, the Commandos are flushed out — some even at the point of their own weapons! *Above:* **This old building belonging to the Hailaust-Gutzeit company was subsequently destroyed; their replacement** *below* **lies a little further along Avenue Demange. (Bundesarchiv)**

Militarily the position was grim as the Commandos were now cut off and surrounded on all sides by water. In front the only way out lay over the southern lock but both bridges were covered by the enemy. The southernmost one was narrow, almost a footbridge, and would be suicidal; the better chance lay with the larger lifting bridge D at the northern end.

With German reinforcements pressing in on them, the decision was made to try to fight their way out rather than surrender. Newman had the survivors divided into small groups, telling each leader to try to break through to the open countryside where they should split up into pairs and attempt to reach Spain.

Below: **Micky Burn and Paddy Bush are marched south out of the warehousing area. (Bundesarchiv)** *Below right:* **This panoramic view, looking south from the top of the bomb-proof lock, gives a good idea of the area on the left where the Commandos fought their last battles. Prisoners were taken to the far end and then to the right across Bridge D and on into the town. The rebuilt old town is in the centre background with the southern lock on the right. A warehouse of the same style as that in the picture** *below* **can be seen on the left.**

Above: **Reaching the end of the quay the pair turn right to cross the bridge, where Lieutenant Stuart Chant gets a helping hand from two sailors. His party was found in the Café Moderne.** *Right:* **There is nothing today to relate to the scene of yesteryear yet this *is* the same corner.** *Below:* **However a little further along in the Place de la Rampe, the Café de l'Atlantique is still in business although rebuilt. This unidentified Scotsman wearing the ochre-coloured kilt apron has surrendered his revolver and is about to lose his helmet.** *Bottom:* **Rather more happy in spite of their misfortune another two Commandos, also unfortunately unidentified, are escorted down Rue de l'Eglise. The comparison again indicates the restructuring of the street layout in this part of the town inasmuch that whereas in 1942 the street ran at a 45 degree angle with the side of the southern lock, now it is parallel to it. (All Bundesarchiv)**

Of all the images to come out of the Second World War this must be one of the most tragic. Private Tom McCormack, grievously wounded in the head, is dying. Later the German propaganda machine would publish the photo demeaningly as 'A picture of a British Commando'; for the moment the Scot waits beside Bunker Ost 6 for attention to his wounds. (Bundesarchiv)

By 3.00 a.m. all was ready. With the wounded being supported by their comrades, the Commandos battled their way through the warehouses bordering the submarine

Below: **Tom McCormack, wearing the kilt of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, and other wounded are lifted aboard a naval truck which has pulled up alongside Bunker No. 6 East.** *Right:* **It stood here on the corner of Place de la Rampe (see aerial picture on page 21).**

Meanwhile Stuart Chant is nearing the makeshift ambulance.

Left: **Having been put aboard, Chant and the other wounded are driven off — first to the German naval hospital in the Hermitage Hotel further round the coast at La Baule, and then on to St Vincent's Hôpital in Rennes, 60 miles inland. There Private McCormack died two weeks later.** *Right:* **Ahead lies Bridge D — the one place which has become a symbol of all the heroic deeds performed at Saint-Nazaire on March 28, 1942. (Bundesarchiv)**

basin and down along the quayside. Ahead lay the bridge . . . Bridge D . . . the Bridge of Memories. The attempt to cross it has since gone down in the annals of British military history alongside such heroic events as Rorke's Drift and the Charge of the Light Brigade. Brigadier C. E. Lucas Philipps described the scene in his book *The Greatest Raid of All* with the following words:

'Disdainful of it all, Donald Roy made on right in the middle of the road, a splendid and inspiring figure, Newman now beside him. Close behind him were Sergeant Rennie, Denison, Montgomery and Haines. They saw the German riflemen athwart the bridge scramble to their feet and retire. They passed the ships that Pritchard had sunk, passed Philip Walton's dead body and swept superbly over the Bridge of Memories, their rubber boots thudding on the hollow road while the bullets rang and sparked on the steelwork or whistled overhead into the night. They were a smaller party now, their route marked by a sprinkling of their dead and wounded, but marked too by the bodies of their enemies. To all those who took part it was the most inspiring moment of the night, like a charge of olden times across fire-swept ground right into the heart of the enemy. In the stirring pages of British history there have been many glorious charges, many heroic assaults on battlemented walls and ramparts deemed impregnable, but, on its smaller scale and in its more modest intent, the break-out of the Commandos at Saint-Nazaire ranks high among them as a manifestation of soldierly purpose and of the will and determination to defy odds. If its purpose was not to defeat an enemy army, but to fight through it to the "green fields beyond", it was nonetheless splendid in its indomitable spirit. The clerks and bakers, the lawyers and engineers, the plumbers and farmers, the students and postmen who made up Charles Newman's tiny army showed in this brave hour the mettle of their pasture and the worth of their breeding.'

The end however was not far away. Daylight was approaching and there was little time to find secure places to lie up to avoid the hue and cry which was bound to follow them. As German patrols saturated the area, one by one the men were picked up, Colonel Newman and his small party being forced to surrender to save their wounded when they were discovered in their cellar. As Commandos, the men received some rough treatment, there being at least two cases documented during the night of men being shot as they tried to surrender.

By now Saint-Nazaire had been sealed off by the Germans with road blocks on every exit as upwards of five thousand infantry

Here Lieutenant Walton was killed in his attempt to destroy it and here Lieutenant-Colonel Newman and the survivors attempted to break out of their enclave. To those that came through it has become the 'Bridge of Memories'.

Commander Ryder aboard the MGB, the last vessel to leave Saint-Nazaire, was awarded the Victoria Cross on his return to England — as was posthumously Able Seaman Savage, his gun layer on the forward pom-pom. Commander Beattie, who had been taken prisoner, was also awarded the VC, the citation 'in recognition not only of his own valour but also of that of the unnamed officers and men of a very gallant ship's company' being read to him by the German PoW camp commandant. However it was not until Charles Newman and the other Saint-Nazaire prisoners were repatriated 3½ years later that the War Office heard the full story first hand, and in June 1945 two more VC awards were announced: to Lieutenant-Colonel Newman and to Sergeant Tom Durrant whose exploit is described overleaf. *Above:* **Newman and Ryder lead the survivors over Bridge D at the parade for the unveiling of the Saint-Nazaire memorial in 1947.**

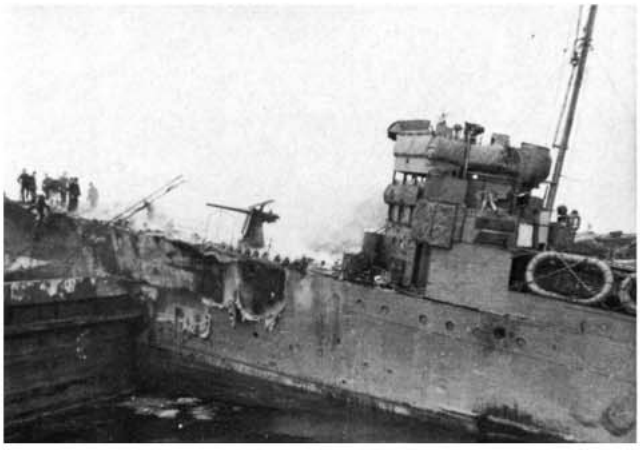
As we have seen, several of the launches were forced to abandon their attempts to put their troops ashore in the face of the withering hail of fire, much to the frustration of the Commandos aboard who, understandably, felt not only let down but that they were letting down their comrades. This picture of one of the survivors amid an oily sea of wreckage was taken next morning. Aboard *ML 306*, commanded by Lieutenant Ian Henderson, Sub-Lieutenant P. J. Dark and Sub-Lieutenant P. W. Landy, was the demolition party for the southern lock gates: Lieutenant R. O. C. Swayne and his men of No. 1 Commando. Around 5.30 a.m., some 45 miles out to sea, en route to the rendezvous with the *Tynedale* and *Atherstone* which were to escort the launches home, five German destroyers were spotted bearing down on them. The ships had been out investigating the attack on the U-Boat the previous evening during the approach to Saint-Nazaire. Now they were hurriedly returning to port in response to a radio call signalling an enemy landing. Being far outgunned, the little motor launch, engines stopped, waited in silence hoping the destroyers would pass them by. However one, the *Jaguar* with Kapitänleutnant Paul on the bridge, deliberately altered course to investigate a shadow spotted on his port side. When the *Jaguar* switched on a searchlight, *ML 306* was caught full in the glare. Immediately both sides opened fire. Casualties on the launch soon mounted from the hail of small arms fire which swept her deck but the German captain held off from using his main armament, hoping to gain a quick surrender and a prize capture. (Bundesarchiv)

The *Jaguar*, still keeping the launch under fire, then swept round on a collision course. Swinging the wheel hard over, the ML managed to escape with a glancing blow which, nevertheless, tossed four men overboard. The attempt to ram them only inspired the men to fight back all the more but casualties mounted as Kapitänleutnant Paul, somewhat annoyed, opened up with his larger anti-aircraft guns, scoring a hit on the bridge killing Lieutenant Henderson, his coxswain and wounding Sub-Lieutenant Dark. With Able Seaman Alder wounded on the twin AA Lewis gun mounting, Sergeant Tom Durrant, already hit in three places during the river battle, took over. When Paul called out in English to those still alive to surrender, Durrant replied with a burst of fire. Paul loud-hailed again for them to give up but the dying sergeant, covered in blood from numerous wounds, hit the bridge with a well-aimed burst which came within an inch of killing the German captain. Backing off Paul began firing again and Durrant fell riddled in both arms, both legs, stomach, chest and head. With only a dozen men left standing, Lieutenant Swayne then called out that they could not go on. Having taken the prisoners on board, the *Jaguar* then returned to Saint-Nazaire where they were put ashore at the quayside near the southern lock in the Avant Port. *Left:* A well-earned cigarette for Lieutenant Swayne, right, and Sub-Lieutenant Landy. Corporal Evans sits with his back to the camera. *Right:* It can now be seen that Corporal Evans is comforting Sergeant Chappell on the stretcher. Private Bishop is wounded in the head while Private Eckmann rests on his elbow behind. (Bundesarchiv)

A brief moment to relax and unwind. *Left:* **Sub-Lieutenant Dark (extreme left) and Swayne, with back to camera hiding Landy, with their men. Telegraphist Newman stands with Private Eckmann while Corporal Evans kneels with his submarine smock tied around his neck. Also identified in the group are Private Bishop, Ordinary Seamen Batteson, Stoker Ritchie and Lance Sergeant Gallagher.** *Right:* **Dark, Swayne and Landy with Private Bishop lead the way from the quayside. On the right Ralph Batteson assists Stoker Butcher.** *Below:* **Swayne waits to give a helping shoulder. (Bundesarchiv)**

Kapitänleutnant Paul was so impressed with the bravery of the sergeant gunner who had suffered 25 wounds that a German officer called on Lieutenant-Colonel Newman about a week later to bring this praise to his attention 'as you may wish to recommend him for a high award'. Of course nothing about the battle was known in England until after the war when the survivors returned to tell their tale. Sergeant Tom Durrant was awarded the Victoria Cross on June 15, 1945.

As Swayne and his men were being marched away the *Campbeltown*, although out of sight to them, was still lying intact firmly wedged against the caisson. She had settled by the stern as a result of the sea cocks being opened just after she hit, but the Germans were completely oblivious to the hidden danger below her decks. Swarms of men clambered all over her and others merely stood around gawping at the rare sight of a ship which had rammed dry land at speed. The man *below right* even appears to be looting the wreck — is this the Ensign folded up under his arm? (Bundesarchiv)



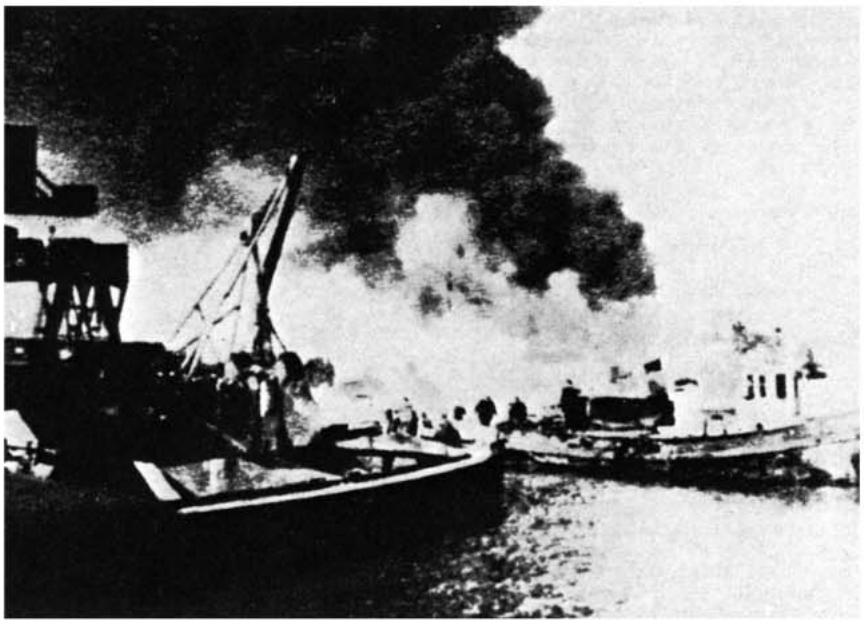
troops began a house-to-house search. Naval forces were sweeping the harbour area, bringing in both the living and the dead, while senior officers and technical experts swarmed over the *Campbeltown*. Although explosives were suspected, these were so well concealed that the Germans continued to explore the ship throughout the early morning.

As ten o'clock came and went with no explosion from the *Campbeltown,* the spirits of Colonel Newman and his small party, now being held at German headquarters, sank. They could only think that the Germans must have discovered the charge and had managed to defuze it as the latest possible time for the delayed-action fuzes to work, allowing for a margin of plus or minus two hours, was 9.30 a.m. Thus one can imagine the elation of all the men, wherever they were in the Saint-Nazaire area that morning, when, at 10.35 a.m. a mighty explosion rent the air and a huge pall of black smoke and flame erupted from the old destroyer. Her bows completely vaporised as the force of the explosion ruptured the caisson, allowing the sea to pour into the empty dock, the tidal wave sweeping the stern section of the *Campbeltown* along with it. Two tankers that had been berthed inside were uplifted like corks and smashed against the walls as steel debris and the horrific remnants of the hundred and fify-odd Germans caught on the destroyer rained down up to a mile away. Pandemonium ensued as the shocked Germans surveyed the scene of carnage and devastation.

With Sunday having come and gone without any further surprises, the Germans had regained some sort of equilibrium as they began the grisly task of clearing up. On Monday security was relaxed and French workmen were allowed back into the dock area to assist when at four o'clock — over 50 hours after the *Campbeltown* had gone up — another large explosion thundered out from the direction of the entrance to the eastern lock gates. With all British troops in the bag (or so the Germans thought) the French Underground was an immediate suspect. By now the Germans were in an ugly mood, but no sooner had instructions been issued for patrols to be sent out and home searches to begin, than another mighty explosion rang out. This was too much and the nerves of the normally well disciplined German troops snapped. Already jumpy, by nightfall they were firing at anybody in sight, including their own men, and gunfire and the explosion of grenades once again crashed out in the town.

In fact the two explosions had come from two delayed-action torpedoes fired by *MTB 74* which had brought up the rear of the convoy. These had been successfully loosed at the eastern lock gates by Sub-Lieutenant R. C. M. Wynn, the surprise explosions having achieved much more than just the material damage.

It did little to quell the temper of Hitler, who had already ordered the Commander-in-Chief of all forces in the West, Feldmarschall von Rundstedt, to conduct personally an immediate on-the-spot enquiry to find out how the British could have been able to wreak such havoc at a vital port hundreds of miles from England without being detected.



Then at 10.35 a.m., completely without warning, she exploded, sending well over a hundred Germans on board into oblivion. The thunderclap explosion and mighty column of smoke and flame heralded the final success of the mission although an event unseen by its architect, Lieutenant William Pritchard, lying dead in the old town.

Ten days later No. 1 Squadron rephotographed Saint-Nazaire and brought back this picture. The huge caisson lies badly buckled along the inner wall while the *Campbeltown* has completely disappeared under the waters of the flooded dock. At the other end German engineers are attempting to use a suction dredger to build a sand dyke to reinforce the inner caisson which has survived the demolition attempt.

Flushing out the last of the Commandos. These three prints when assembled like this give a remarkable panorama of a lorry-borne 20mm AA gun in action just to the west of the Avant Port, the bunker No. 1 South being pinpointed on the aerial picture on the previous page. (Bundesarchiv)

In the official German report the remarkable success of the operation was acknowledged in that it had been cleverly planned and boldly executed. A comparison was drawn with the Zeebrugge raid of the First World War and it was thought that if the British had used larger ships as had been done on St George's Day in April 1918, capable of withstanding more punishment, the raid could have been a complete success.

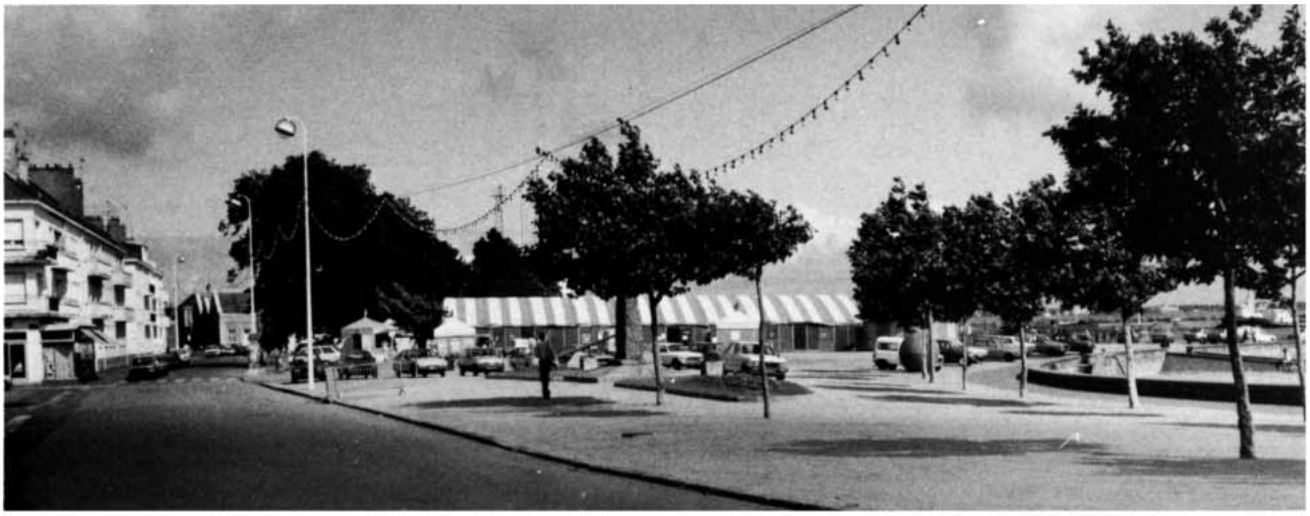
As it was, of the ten small vessels which managed to escape the Loire, *ML 177* was hit and abandoned before she left the river; *MTB 74* was knocked out by a direct hit some six miles from Saint-Nazaire, and *ML 306* lost forty-five miles out to sea after a heroic battle with the German destroyer *Jaguar*. *MGB 314* and the three MLs (*156*, *270* and *446*) which managed to get as far as the rendezvous with destroyers sent to meet them had to be scuttled as they would have drastically imperilled the return journey and slowed the effort to get the wounded back to hospitals in Britain as quickly as possible. *ML160*, *307* and *443* were able to make it home under their own steam.

As far as a comparison with Zeebrugge is concerned, the losses sustained at Saint-Nazaire were proportionately twice as high. A total of 1,784 men had taken part in the raid on the Belgian port, of whom 195 were killed, whereas at Saint-Nazaire, out of the

Today this is the Place du Commando and here on April 24, 1982 the veteran 'Charioteers' marched proudly to the inspection before Prince Philip for the 40th anniversary parade. Her Majesty The Queen had honoured the men by providing the Royal Yacht *Britannia* for them to return to Saint-Nazaire.

On Wednesday, April 1, four days after the *Campbeltown* had exploded, the Germans held a ceremony in a field at Escoublac, near La Baule, for the burial of the dead of both sides. Twenty British prisoners were allowed to attend under Lieutenant Hopwood who had led the protection party for the demolitions at the north end of the dock. Lieutenant Burtinshaw was one of the men he now came to bury. Here, with Sergeant Bayliss in the lead, Lieutenant Purdon, Sergeant Jones and Private Whelan pay their last respects.

The first burials at Escoublac had taken place in 1940 and included a number of British servicemen washed ashore from the *Lancastria*. Throughout the occupation a local French lady maintained the graves and after the war the Commonwealth War Graves Commission confirmed the location as a permanent cemetery. Sergeant Durrant lies here but Able Seaman Savage, the other posthumous VC, is buried in Falmouth. (Private McCormack, because he died in hospital at Rennes, is buried there in the Eastern Communal Cemetery.)

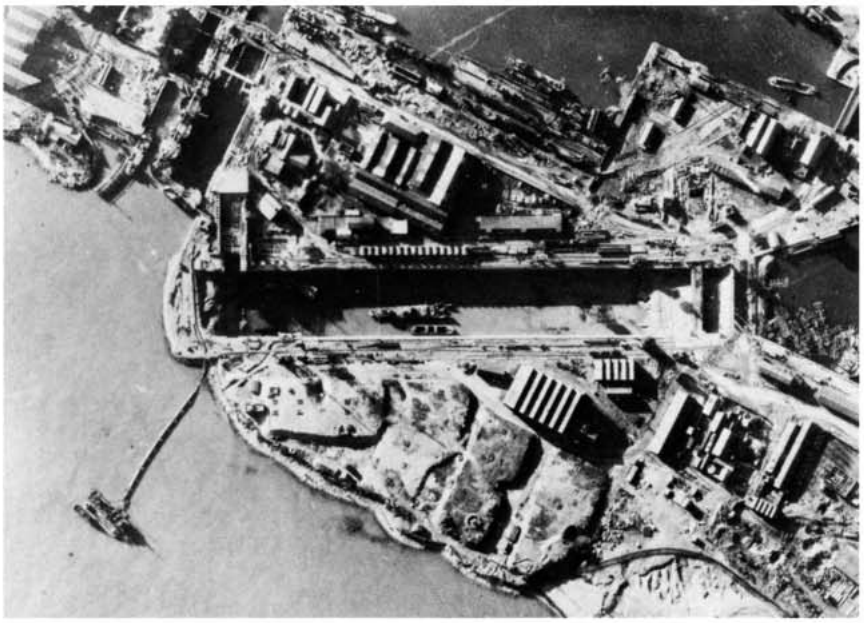


611 who went into action, 169 lost their lives. The Germans buried the bodies they had recovered by the Wednesday following the raid in a field at Escoublac near La Baule where their naval headquarters were situated, together with German dead — the Germans admitting a total of 42 killed and 127 wounded plus those lost on the *Campbeltown* for whom a precise total could not be established. This field later became a permanent cemetery, now maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Around two hundred men were captured, to spend the remainder of the war in captivity (many at Marlag und Milag Nord — the naval PoW camp at Westertimke — *see After the Battle No. 14*) but five Commandos managed to evade capture and, successfully carrying out Colonel Newman's last order, eventually made their way to Spain, Gibraltar and thence to England.

As far as the actual goal of Operation Chariot was concerned, that was accomplished absolutely; so well in fact that the dry dock was denied not only to the Tirpitz but to the French after the war, it not being back in operation until 1948! Moreover, being a major operation rather than a pinprick raid, its success signalled to Occupied Europe that all was not lost and that Britain still had the capability of launching bold, imaginative counter-strokes. That such optimism was somewhat premature was to be brought home with a cruel vengeance just four months later at Dieppe *(see after the Battle No. 5)*.

'They achieved much having dared all.' Fine words on the Saint-Nazaire memorial on the sea front facing the Place du Commando. Alongside, the now-silent 12-pdr gun from the *Campbeltown*.



Almost a year after the attack, with the Normandie dock pumped out, the *Campbeltown* lies high and dry with her bows completely blown off. Work is proceeding to build a bomb-proof roof over the slot for the caisson and a dam has been built for the new eastern lock — future home of the Ecomusée. (IWM)

SAINT-NAZAIRE ÉCOMUSEUM

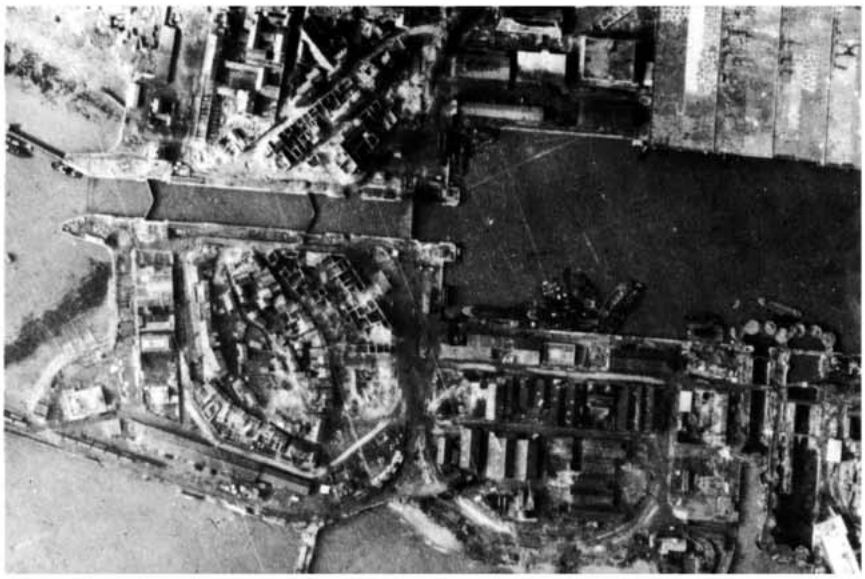
Since our first visit to Saint-Nazaire in 1985 for issue No. 55 which covered the various French U-Boat bases, a remarkable event has taken place: the inauguration of a submarine museum inside the bomb-proof lock built alongside the eastern entrance after the March 1942 raid when the vulnerability of lock gates was brought home forcibly to the Germans.

The idea of having a submarine on display at Saint-Nazaire was first mooted in 1981 but it was not until 1983 that Madame Michèle Nolla, the curator of the Écomusée at Saint-Nazaire, sent an official request to the French Navy asking for a decommissioned submarine to be made available to the museum. In 1984, the team responsible for the project visited the French submarine base at Lorient to examine the boat on offer and they then went to Gosport to see how the Royal Navy Submarine Museum had solved the various difficulties of displaying submarines to the public.

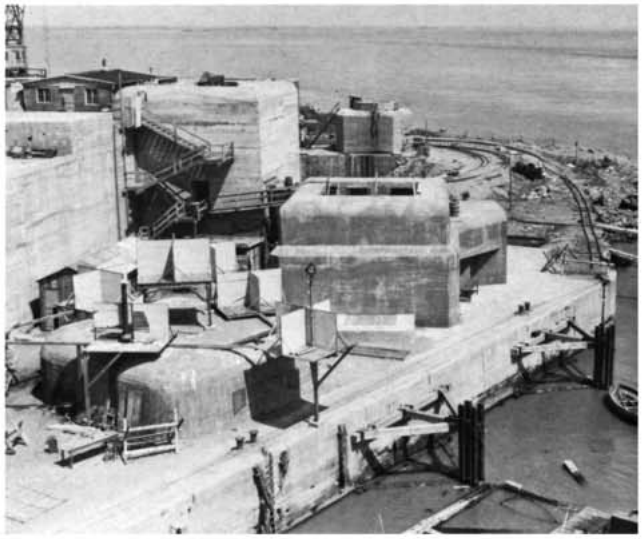
On September 10, 1985, the *Espadon* went for her last voyage with the French Navy. On board was the commander of the submarine base at Lorient and fifteen of the *Espadon*'s sixteen former commanders. The voyage lasted only ten hours, during which time she submerged for the last time. The following day the *Espadon* was decommissioned and on December 13 an agreement was signed between the Minister of Defence and the town of Saint-Nazaire whereby the French Navy gave the *Espadon* to the museum at no cost.

The submarine was due to enter the Saint-Nazaire basin early on the morning of Saturday, August 23, 1986 but, because of difficulties with one of the tugboats involved, she missed the tide and it was not until 8.30 p.m. that she entered via the southern lock *(see pages 32 and 33 in ATB No. 55)*.

To put the *Espadon* inside the bomb-proof lock was not as simple as it sounds, for this entrance had been abandoned after the war and it was now filled with rubbish, odd wreckage and sand. While the *Espadon* was temporarily moored at the Quai des Frégattes undergoing modifications to prepare her for display, the work on cleaning out the lock started in September. The initial plan was to build a line of chocks and let the *Espadon* rest on these but because of the unstable nature of the soft bottom of the lock, the engineers were forced to look for an alternative solution. Thus instead of being shown dry-docked it was decided that the sub-



Although Saint-Nazaire had been raided several times by the Eighth Air Force in 1942, it was in January 1943 that it was given the status of the No. 2 priority target in the war against the U-Boats. In the first six months of that year it was attacked five times during the day by the Americans and three times at night by the RAF. *Centre:* **This picture was taken in February and already much of the old town has been laid waste yet the U-Boat pen is hardly scratched. The caisson bunker, bottom right, has been completed yet little has been done to the bomb-proof lock. (IWM)** *Right:* **As has been explained, because of the massive destruction post-war reconstruction 'cleaned up' the street layout, completely realigning much of the area appearing in the April 1942 photographs. This modern aerial survey covers the same area.**



Left: **By 1945 a mass of reinforced-concrete gun positions had been built to defend the Normandie dock which is hidden from view by the protective caisson bunker on the left, this picture being taken from the roof of the bomb-proof lock. The outer sand dyke still remains. (US Army)** *Right:* **All the structures were removed from the quayside after the war, the lock bunker fortunately remaining and now an ideal setting for its new lease of life as a museum. (P. Gorneg, Ecomusée)**

marine would be shown floating in the water. Although the lock will remain open at its inner end, the water is only about five metres deep so will not actually carry her but will give the impression of her afloat, while sand sunk on both sides of her keel will prevent her from rolling. However, this solution has one inherent shortcoming in that as the submarine will be in sea water, she will have to be cleaned from time to time — every three years is the current estimation. One possibility is that the *Espadon* will be towed out of her pen to a dry dock — this is easy as Saint-Nazaire has all the facilities on hand — or the lock will be closed on the basin side, the water pumped out and the *Espadon* cleaned in situ.

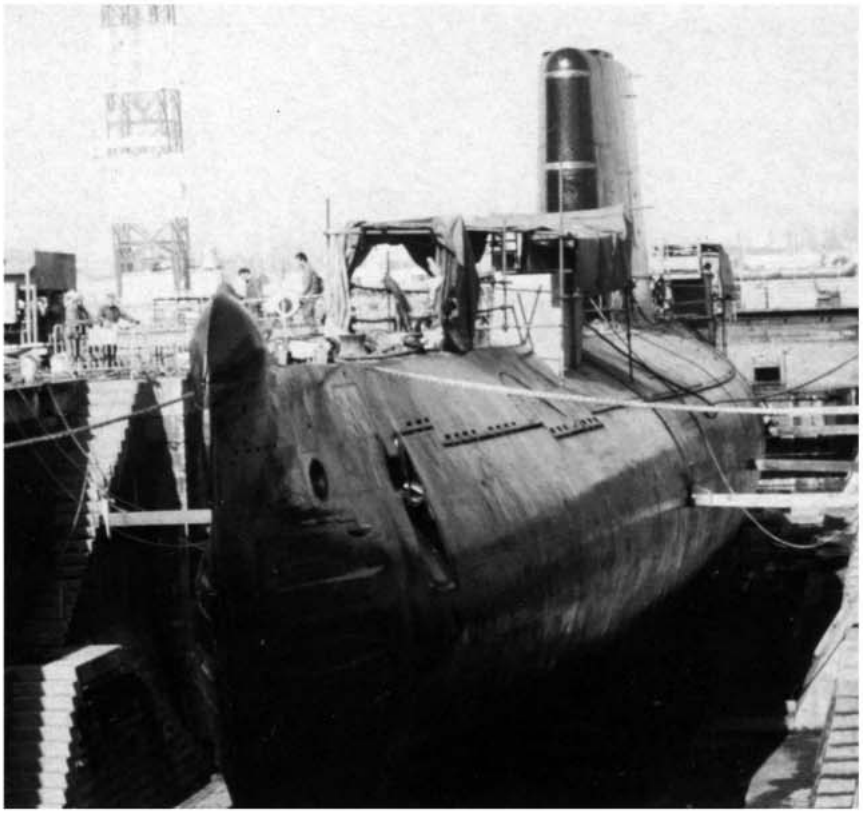
The first phase of the operation was to make the roof of the lock waterproof. After this, the lock was cleared of all sand and lime accumulated there and a wall constructed to seal the lock off at its seaward end (or the Loire river estuary to be more precise). The entrance at the basin end had also to be cleared of the wreckage of the protective shutters that had been blown up in 1945, still lying in the lock entrance. The bridge which spans the lock at the western inner end beside the historic bridge G of the Commando raid now carries the road which passes through the concrete walls of the lock. This bridge had to be raised to enable the *Espadon* to enter the lock, no easy task because it had not been lifted since the war! The walls and ceiling of the bomb-proof lock were all cleaned and all the metallic parts repainted. A powerful ventilation system was also installed to keep humidity at a reasonable level, both within the submarine and the lock bunker.

Meanwhile the *Espadon* was prepared for display and her interior modified: some passages being enlarged and some bulkheads removed and replaced by transparent partitions so that visitors can see into various compartments. Two openings were cut through the hull so that visitors can enter into the *Espadon*, walk along the whole length of her interior and reach the quay via external stairs.

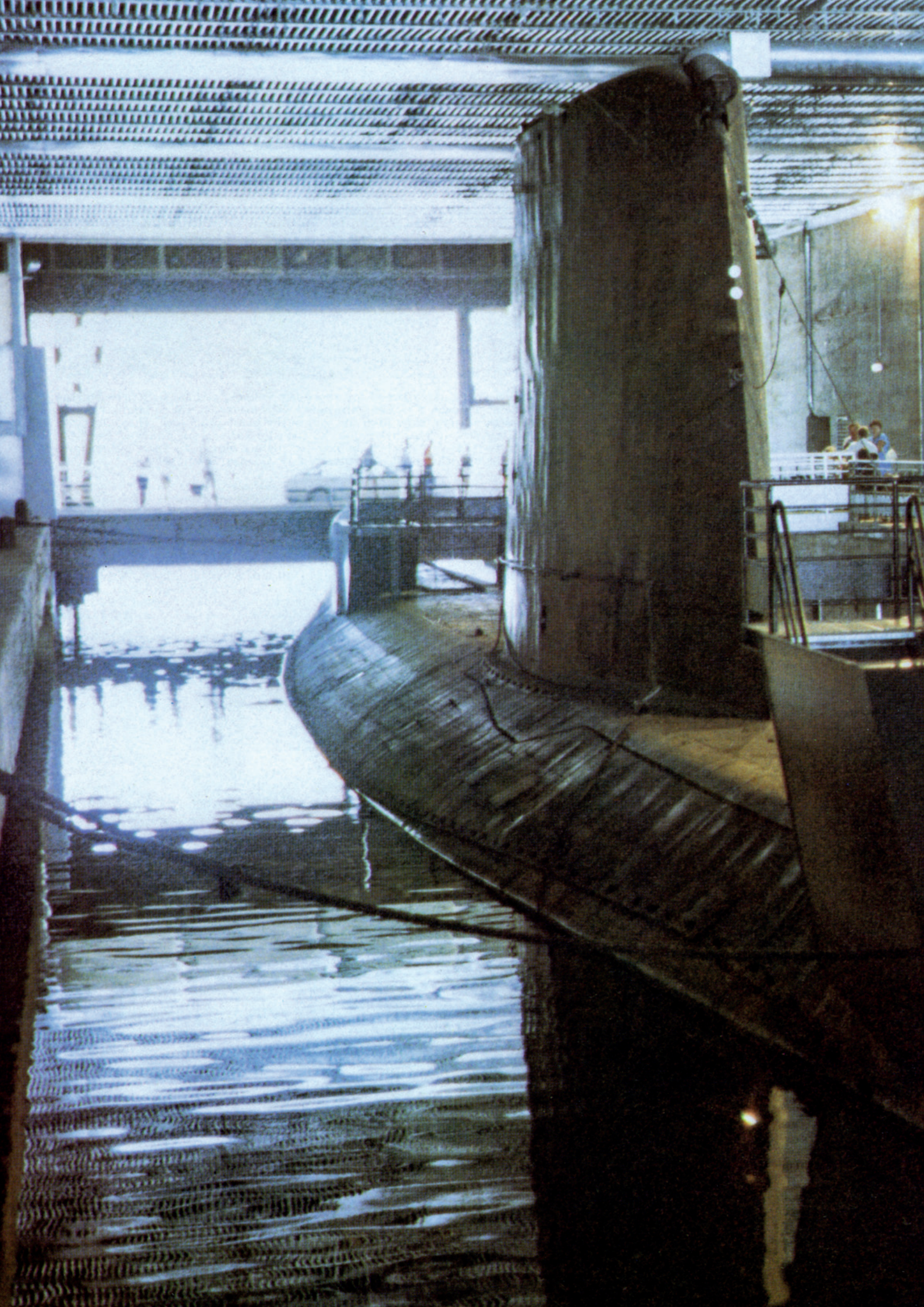
When all had been prepared, the *Espadon* entered the lock from the basin side on the afternoon of May 11, 1987. The next day she was laid in position and packed with sand, after which the road bridge was lowered.

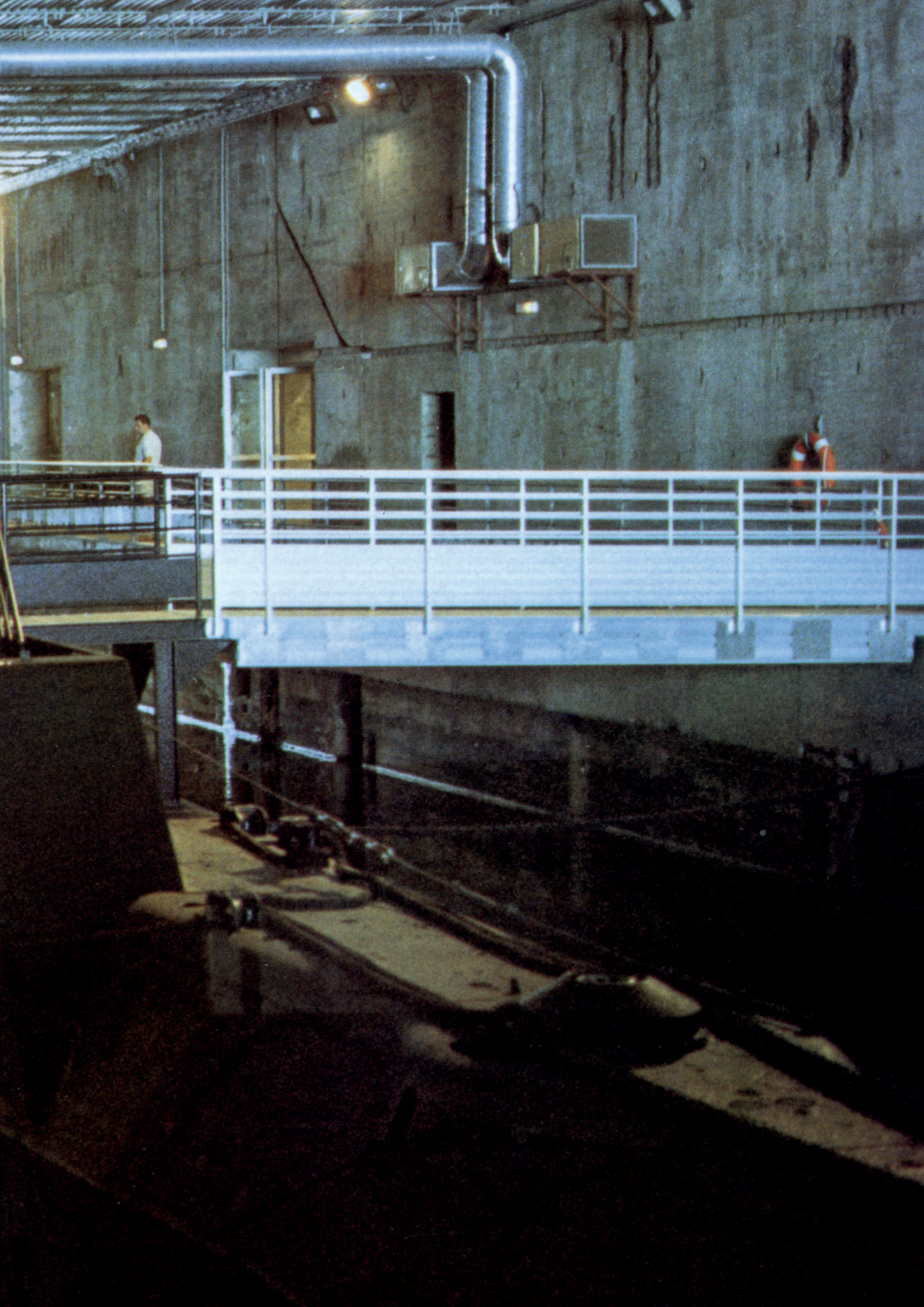
The inauguration of the submarine took place on June 26 when the Mayor of Saint-Nazaire, Monsieur Joel-Guy Batteux, cut the traditional ribbon, although the Écomusée is still being developed and there are still several projects to be completed. One possible idea is to open up the pumping station built by the Germans to operate the lock.

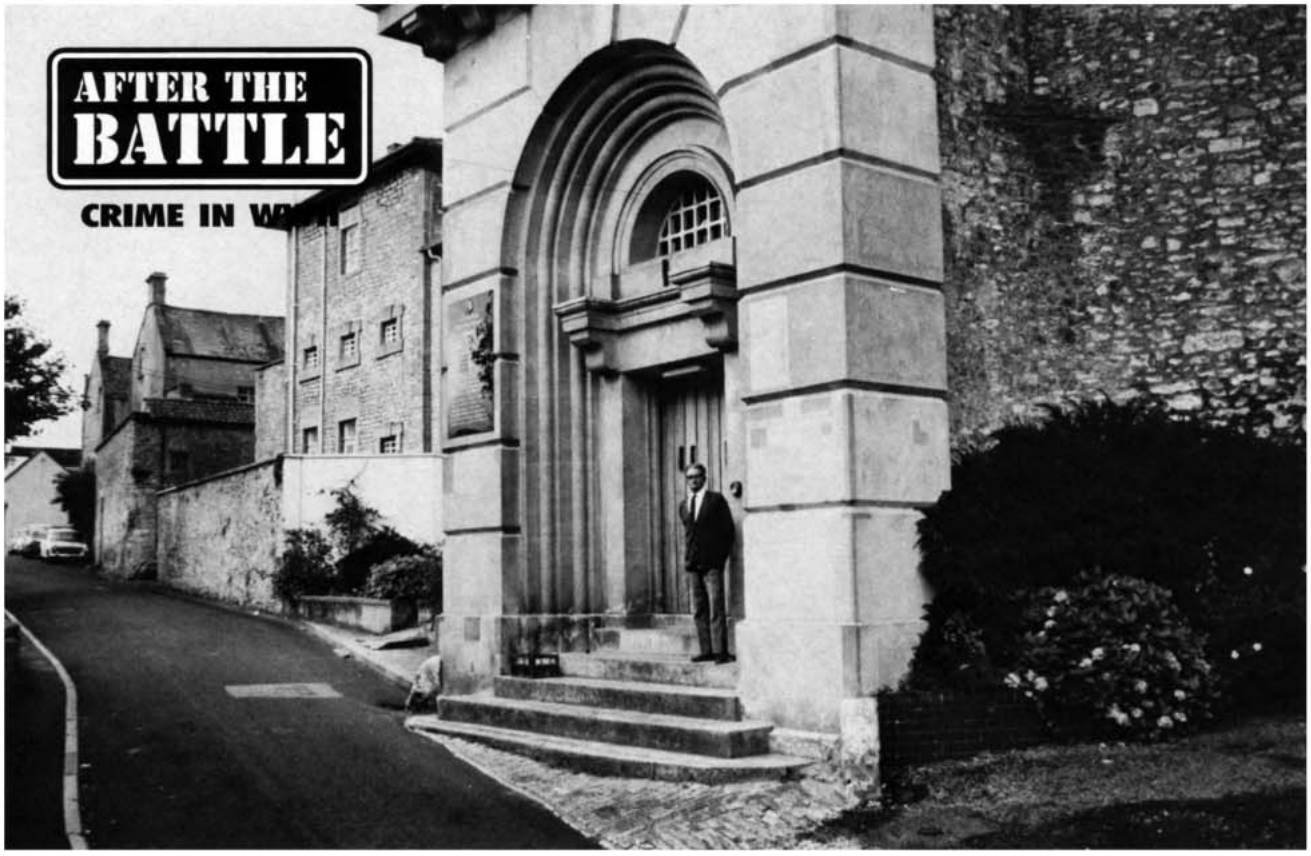
The actual bunker itself is interesting and from its roof visitors have a superb view of the Loire estuary, the U-Boat pens, the harbour, and the Normandie dry dock of *Campbeltown* fame. A display has currently been set up in the large room on the northern side where pictures, documents and dioramas illustrate the military history of Saint-Nazaire from 1848 to 1945. The history of the harbour as one of the main bases of the US Army during the First World War is illustrated, as is the drama of the sinking of the *Lancastria* on June 17, 1940, when upwards of 3,000 lives were lost, most of them British soldiers, when the ship was sunk by a German aircraft. The successful escape of the French battleship *Jean-Bart*, then under construction, on June 18, which managed to reach Casablanca under its own power; Operation Chariot and the history of the U-Boat base are also included. A ten-minute film compiled from sequences of German origin showing the construction of the base at Saint-Nazaire and the U-Boat activity is also shown.



The S-637 *Espadon* is a Narval Class submarine, an improved development by the French based on the Type XXI U-Boat. She was launched in September 1958 and served with the French Atlantic Squadron from 1960 to 1985. Here she is seen in the Penhoët dry dock (*see ATB 55 page 35*) undergoing modifications for her display. (D. Macel, Ecomusée)



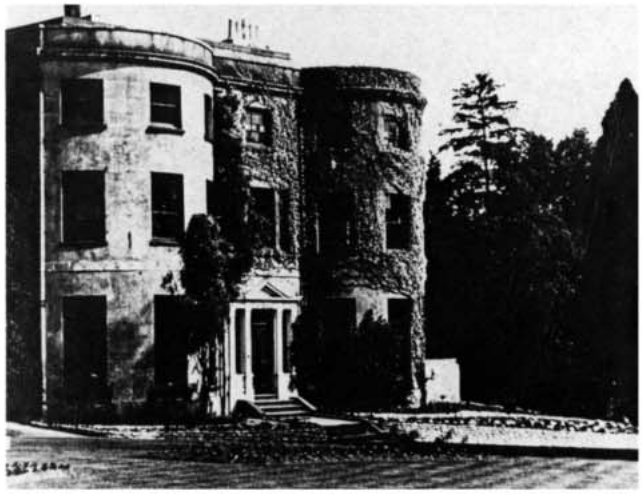




THE US PRISON AT SHEPTON MALLET

On April 14, 1942 the President of the United States, in a letter to the US Secretary of War, directed that the Judge Advocate General establish a branch with the United States Armed Forces in the United Kingdom. The office was to include a Board of Review to perform in all cases involving sentences by General Courts-Martial not requiring approval or confirmation by the President. Colonel Lawrence H. Hedrick (promoted to Brigadier General prior to his arrival in the European Theater) was designated the Assistant Judge Advocate General in command, and the Branch Office was formally opened at Charlton House, Cheltenham, on July 18. The total officer personnel was seven.

The first American military forces had arrived in the UK in January 1942, coming ashore at Belfast in Northern Ireland *(see After the Battle No. 34)*. Thereafter there was a continuous trans-oceanic movement of personnel and equipment from the United States, and the United Kingdom became a semi-permanent base of operations. As it was realised that American troops would occupy a unique position with regard to the



Charlton House, Cheltenham. From July 1942 to October 1944 (when it moved to Paris) this was the headquarters of the American military justice system in Europe — officially designated BOTJAG — the Branch Office of The Judge Advocate General. At its head was an Assistant JAG, Brigadier General Lawrence H. Hedrick, succeeded on June 20, 1943 by Brigadier General Edwin C. McNeil. *Left:* **The General's office, where the files of the cases of all those accused of capital crimes in the UK were examined and from where the findings of the JAG Board of Review were dispatched under his signature to the Commanding General of the European Theater for approval, is to the right of the entrance on the ground floor.** *Right:* **Today this is the corporate headquarters of the holding company of the world-wide energy conservation group, Spirax-Sarco Ltd, its chairman occupying the same office as Hedrick and McNeil. Part of the group is American, operating from Allentown Pennsylvania, hence the US flag — a rather appropriate symbol in view of wartime use of the building.**

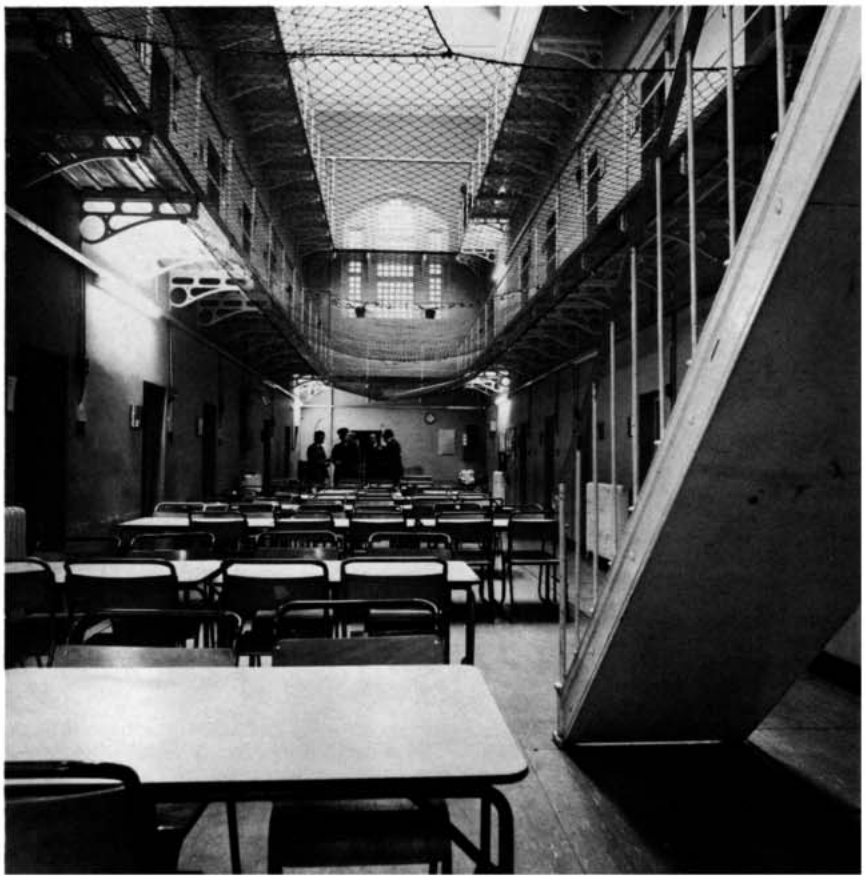
Shepton Mallet is Britain's oldest-serving prison, having been built in 1625-27 at a cost of £300. When the prison population declined after the First World War the prison was closed but kept in good repair for possible future use. With the outbreak of hostilities the military authorities had the need for additional glasshouses and the buildings were transferred to the Army in October 1939. It was soon filled to capacity, some 300 prisoners occupying the 162 cells, and overflow facilities had to be provided from Nissan huts built within the walls. Discipline was harsh and drill and PT was carried out in the enclosed exercise yard *above*. **When the Americans arrived in Europe their first military offenders were held in Holywood in Northern Ireland but in mid-1942 an American advance party of an officer and two enlisted men arrived to begin the American take-over of the prison. Over the next three weeks all the British prisoners were transferred elsewhere and a period of three months was then spent in getting everything ready for the new inmates. Bill Pyle was the British civilian works foreman in charge who continued in his rôle throughout the war. He finally retired in 1969 — we went back to the prison with him in 1978, when he was aged 76, and photographed him outside the main entrance** *(opposite top)*.

inhabitants, an amicable international understanding was necessary to define this special relationship. As a result of negotiations between the American Ambassador, the Honourable John G. Winant, and the Rt Hon Anthony Eden, Parliament enacted the United States of America (Visiting Forces) Act of 1942 which became effective on August 8. Amongst its provisions was the pre-eminent clause which stated that 'no criminal proceedings shall be prosecuted in the United Kingdom before any court of the United Kingdom against a member of the military or naval forces of the United States of America' (subject to certain exceptions).

The Act also provided for a method of administrative proof that a given individual was 'subject to the military and naval law' of the United States, and foreign employees of the American forces were only subject to these provisions if they entered into that employment outside the United Kingdom. Disparity arose with British civil and criminal law over certain crimes such as rape, which could carry the death sentence under US military law but which had not been a capital offence in England and Wales since 1861.

Parallel to the legal formalities was the practical necessity of providing a secure means of detention for American military prisoners although European Military Theater HQ laid down that the principle of confinement as a punishment should not be resorted to for other than capital offences until all other methods of making a disciplined soldier had failed. Soldiers were to be advised that action which led to imprisonment was a contribution to the enemy cause since it immobilised him as an effective fighting force and also tied up personnel to guard and feed him. The ultimate intention was to restore to duty a self-respecting, better trained soldier as soon as these objectives had been obtained. Those prisoners not

American military offenders were designated either Garrison Prisoners, where the sentence did not warrant dismissal or discharge, or General Prisoners. Each type was classified into 'A' for minor offences of a purely military character; 'B' for serious civil or military crimes but only those which would not ordinarily be punished by imprisonment in a penitentiary, and 'C' for those serious crimes which involved 'moral turpitude'. Class A prisoners wore the ordinary uniform of a private but without any decorations; Class B had a six-inch white letter 'P' on their backs and Class C the same, except that the letter was black. General Prisoners were also graded according to conduct known respectively as first, second and third grades. Some 300 American prisoners arrived at the Shepton Mallet railway station in Charlton Road in the autumn of 1942 and were marched under armed guard to the rear entrance of the prison in Frithfield Lane. *Above:* **This gate was walled up in the 1970s and a new entrance cut beside it on the corner. (The original gate can be seen on the aerial photograph on page 41.)**



When the first prisoners arrived a welcoming meal was ready waiting on trestle tables. Today the eating facilities have been upgraded to those of a canteen standard; otherwise the interior is largely unchanged.

considered suitable for rehabilitation were returned to the United States for completion of sentence.

Disciplinary Training Centers were established, renamed Base (Section) Guard Houses in 1944, under the supervision of the Theater Provost Marshal.

The Northern Ireland Disciplinary Barracks was activated on August 21, 1942 at Holywood, County Down, its first commandant being Captain Donald L. DeMuth, formerly the CO of the 234th Military Police Company, and redesignated Disciplinary Training Center No. 1 in October. However, once the Judge Advocate was operational in Cheltenham a Disciplinary Training Center on the mainland was essential. Fifty miles to the south, on the edge of the Mendip Hills, the British military authorities had the use of the former civil prison at Shepton Mallet, which had been loaned to them by the Home Office in October 1939, and it was taken over by Major DeMuth as the new location of Disciplinary Training Center No. 1. From June 14, 1943 its commander was Lieutenant Colonel James C. Cullens, its title being changed on September 23 to Disciplinary Training Center No. 2912.

We were exceptionally granted permission by the Home Office to visit and take photographs in the prison, our request helped because it now contains Category C low-security classification prisoners serving medium-term sentences (not to be confused with the American military grades). Apart from Bill Pyle your Editor's other guide was Stan Dyer who was a guard at Shepton when it reverted to the jurisdiction of the British Army after the war. If I look rather nervous it is because a) this was my first time 'inside' and b) we are in the prison's so-called haunted cell. Then, after chatting with the Governor, George Iles, he assured me that I was the type who would be broken by a prison regime. After that I really enjoyed my visit!

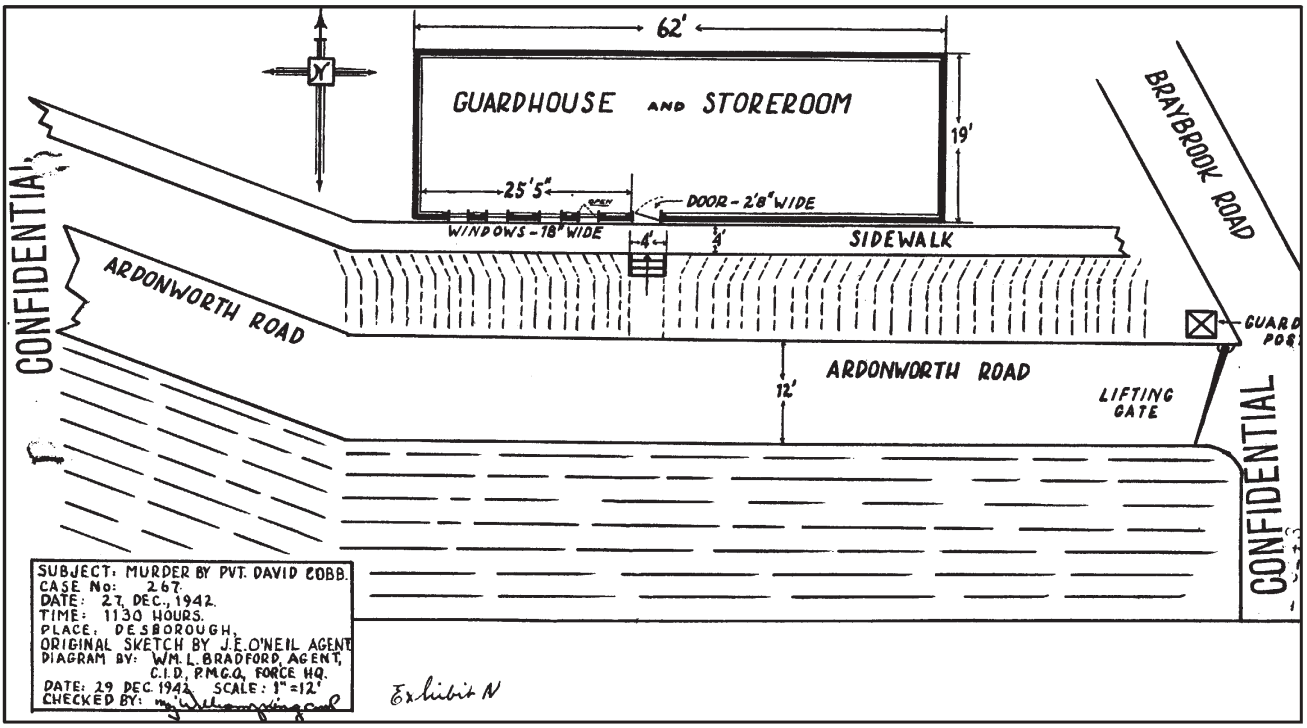
Acting on the instructions of the Judge Advocate General (JAG), facilities were provided to segregate those prisoners convicted of 'murder, manslaughter, arson, robbery, rape, sodomy, mayhem (American terminology for wounding) or larceny of property of more than $50 in value' from other general prisoners.

Most Judge Advocates believed that the death sentence was of dubious value as a deterrent, but that it was justified as a means of eliminating from society the worst class of offenders. Up to October 31, 1945, 443 death sentences had been issued in the whole of the European Theater of Operations, 34 per cent for rape (151 cases); 30 per cent for murder or murder and rape (100 cases); 19 per cent for desertion (130 cases), the remainder for a miscellany of offences such as misbehaviour before the enemy (24 cases), assaulting or disobeying an officer (24 cases), and one mutiny. Offenders were split 55 per cent white and 45 per cent coloured. Of these 443 sentences only 108 were confirmed but sent to the Board of Review for review, which approved 104. Subsequently 70 of these men were executed.

Two main patterns generally characterised the rapes that occurred in the United Kingdom in the pre-invasion period. The first was of the less violent type. In a typical case the soldier and the girl were acquainted and spent a portion of their time at a pub drinking. Afterwards the girl permitted some personal liberties but the soldier, encouraged by her conduct, forced her to have sexual intercourse with him. Such cases did not always attract a sentence of death.

The second pattern was where the victim was subjected to severe violence throughout the entire transaction. There was no pretence or claim in defence that the girl consented, and no effort at seduction. The woman was simply attacked and raped, and invariably the guilty men paid the supreme penalty.

In the United Kingdom the death sentence was carried out on 19 American servicemen convicted of crimes committed during the war: 8 for rape and 11 for murder.



PRIVATE DAVID COBB

Private Cobb, a 21-year-old coloured soldier from Dothan, Alabama, was serving with the 827th Engineer Battalion (Aviation) at the ordnance depot at Desborough, Northamptonshire. On the morning of December 27, 1942 Cobb was on guard duty outside the guardhouse at the entrance to the depot leading off Braybrook Road. At 11.30 a.m. 2nd Lieutenant Robert J. Cobner came to the guardhouse whereupon Cobb announced that he was not going to stand on his post any longer because he had been on duty for four hours. Lieutenant Cobner reprimanded Cobb for carrying his rifle across his shoulder in an improper manner and told him to stand to attention while addressing an officer. Cobb's reply was that as he was confined to barracks for an earlier offence he did not care, at which stage Lieutenant Cobner called the Sergeant of the Guard, Corporal Mason, to arrest him. As Mason approached, Cobb brought his rifle down to his waist and said that he would not give his gun to anyone until he was properly relieved. When Corporal Mason failed to take the rifle, Lieutenant Cobner stepped forward. Cobb shot him through the heart.

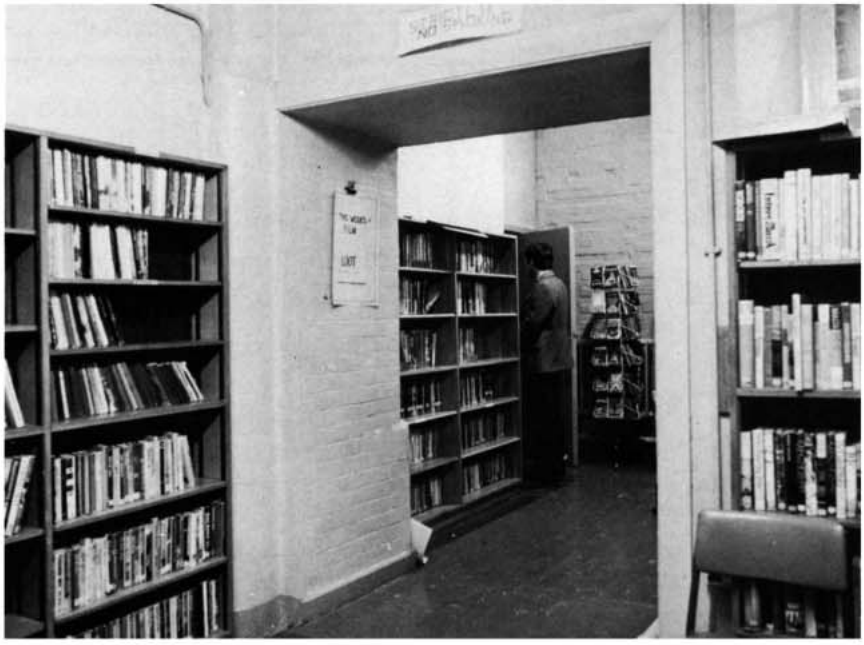
At his General Court-Martial held in Cambridge on January 6, 1943, Cobb claimed in his defence that he did not know that Lieutenant Cobner was the Officer of the Day and that he had been taught that the proper way to relieve a guard was for the Sergeant to bring a relief. The Court proved that Cobb did know the dead man and held that he was guilty of murder. The Board of Review which examined the case on February 19 held that there were no mitigating circumstances and that 'to commute the judgement of the court in this case . . . would seriously jeopardise discipline'.

On March 12, 1943 Private Cobb became the first GI to enter the execution chamber at Shepton Mallet. Although US forces were allowed to retain most of the traditional formalities of an American execution, the actual method had to conform to British practice. The American style noose with its hangman's knot was not permitted, neither was the standard five foot drop. The British gallows was designed to impart instantaneous death by breaking the victim's neck, the length of the drop being finely calculated according to the physical characteristics of the condemned man.

Albert Pierrepoint, the official Home Office executioner brought in to carry out the sentence, described what happened:

'The timing of the execution was American-style. It was generally carried out at about one o'clock in the morning. Another custom which was strange to me was the practice of laying on a mighty feast before the execution. We were eating badly in this country at that time, but at an American execution you could be sure of the best running buffet and unlimited canned beer. The part of the routine which I found it hardest to acclimatise myself to was the, to me, sickening interval between my introduction to the prisoner and his death. Under British custom I was working to the sort of timing where the drop fell between eight and twenty seconds after I had entered the

Lieutenant Robert Cobner, murdered in cold-blood here at Desborough alongside the road to Arthingworth (note wrong spelling on the scene-of-crime plan), now at rest in the US military cemetery at Cambridge (Plot D, Row 3, Grave 50). Only the steps to the guardroom remain today but they appear to have been turned round; either that or the 'rise' on the plan has been drawn incorrectly.



Shepton Mallet had been used for civilian executions between 1889 and 1926 but the gallows had fallen into disrepair by the time the Americans wanted to use it and the room filled with ARP equipment, Wellington boots and buckets of sand. Early in 1943 Bill Pyle was asked to get the trapdoor working as there was going to be a 'necktie' party. Although no expert in scaffold construction, Bill obtained a lever and installed this on the right-hand side and, with the help of two stokers, tested its operation. The sound of the doors banging open was loud enough to be heard outside the walls and a guard came in to ask if the noise could stop — it was disturbing the occupant of the cell next door, who was waiting to be hung! Today the room has been divided in half: one part being used for the prison library, the other for a warder's rest room. As I moved the rack of paperbacks standing where the trapdoor once lay, I couldn't help smiling at the title of one book prominently displayed at the front, *Heaven Next Stop*. I somehow thought that Private Cobb might have gone to the other place!

condemned cell. Under the American system, after I had pinioned the prisoner, he had to stand on the drop for perhaps six minutes while his charge sheet was read out, sentence spelt out, he was asked if he had anything to say . . . and after that I was instructed to get on with the job.

'Even a few seconds can be a long time when a man is waiting to die. On my first execution at Shepton Mallet, long before the drop fell, the officer of the escorting party surrounding the scaffold was flat on the floor in collapse. Afterwards, at the continuation of the feast, a soldier said to me of the fainting officer: "Just imagine a man like that leading you into battle!" I did not think his scorn was justified. A man can fight like a hero, and still be unable to face the death of a comrade in cold blood.'

PRIVATE HAROLD A. SMITH

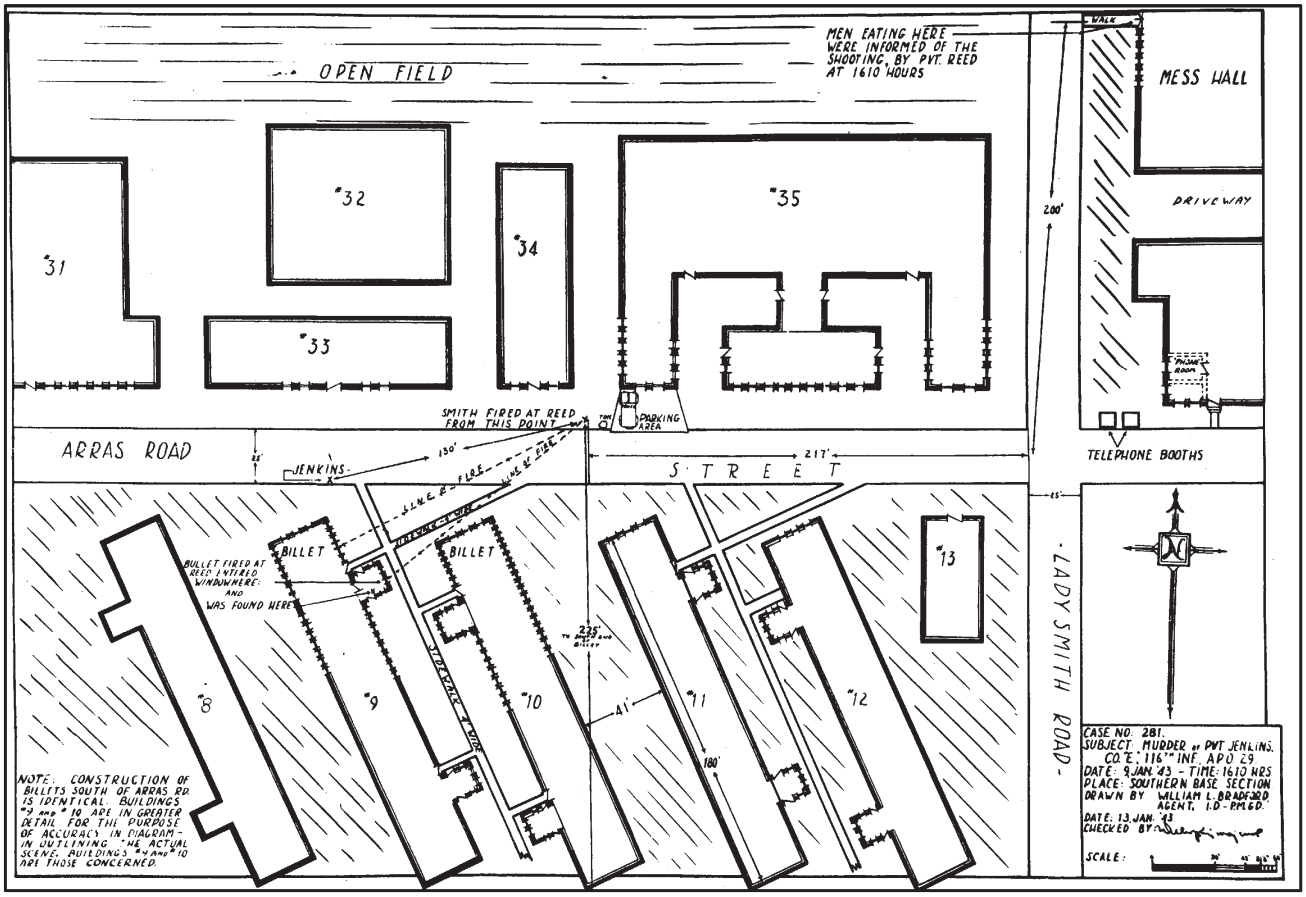
The next execution to be carried out at Shepton Mallet was also as a result of the killing of another American serviceman. Private Smith was born in Troup County in West Georgia and had enlisted in the army on February 4, 1941. In December 1943 he was serving with the Headquarters Company of the First Tank Destroyer Group based at Chisledon Camp near Swindon, Wiltshire.

On New Year's Day 1943, having just been paid, Smith went AWOL and caught a train to London. He teamed up with Private Harry English of the 894th TD Battalion on the journey and together they took a room at the Royal Hotel. After spending a week sight-seeing and going to the cinema, he was running short of money so returned to Chisledon on the evening of January 8 only to find that his unit had moved out. Next morning he hung around the barracks until lunch time, when he went to the mess hall. Returning to the squad room he saw a ·45 calibre automatic pistol with belt lying on a bunk. Buckling it on under his overcoat, he checked the magazine was full and then started walking back to the mess hall.

Outside his hut he was accosted by a guard, Private Harry Jenkins of the 116th Infantry. Although there were no witnesses to the actual shooting, according to Smith's sworn statement the events which transpired read like something out of a western:

'I did not know whether he was going to hit me or draw his pistol and shoot me. At this time the guard and I were about four feet from each other. As the guard made the motion towards his holster I immediately drew my pistol from under my unbuttoned overcoat with my right hand. All in the same motion I pumped a cartridge into the chamber with my left hand and fired point blank at the guard's stomach from the hip position. When the first shot hit the guard he spun around to the right until his back was toward

Albert Pierrepoint's first customer. The scene as it might have appeared on March 12, 1943 as depicted in the opening sequence of the MGM film *The Dirty Dozen*. Bill seemed to think that the author of the book, E. M. Nathanson, had visited Shepton Mallet prison to get the atmosphere, although the country mansion setting of the 'Marston Tyne' jail seen in the film is completely out of character to the location of the real prison which is right in the centre of the town. Also a British hangman was used in every case: 13 being executed by Albert Pierrepoint and 4 by his Uncle Tom.



me. I then fired one or more shots (I can't remember the number) into the guard's back. As I was shooting the guard was falling to the ground. After I had finished firing at the guard at my feet, I remained there for a few moments standing over him with the pistol still in my hand. At this time I saw an unarmed soldier come out of the barracks and run toward me with clenched fists. I fired two shots over his head to scare him. He turned around and ran back into the barracks. I then holstered my pistol and ran away from the scene of the shooting.'

Smith ran out of the camp, caught a bus to Marlborough, some ten miles to the south, and from there a train to Paddington. After remaining at large for a day, at 2.20 a.m. on January 11, while sleeping in a chair in the YMCA rest room at Euston Station, he was accosted by PC James Watson who asked him for his identity card. He was then arrested, his pistol taken from him and he was handed over to the US authorities.

Shoot-out at Camp Chisledon — the pre-war School of Military Administration handed over to the Americans. When we first visited the camp in 1978 much of it was still standing but we could not establish exactly where Private Jenkins had been killed just from reading the record of the trial. It took us several years to track down and obtain a copy of the plan *above* and so pinpoint the precise location on Arras Road, but alas when we returned all had been demolished.

Robert Churchill, the London gunsmith and renowned ballistics expert of the time who was called in to testify as an expert witness in many cases of shooting, gave evidence that the Colt No. 515525 carried by Smith was the murder weapon, and at a General Court-Martial held at Bristol on March 12, 1943 Smith was found guilty and sentenced to death. He was hung at Shepton on June 25.

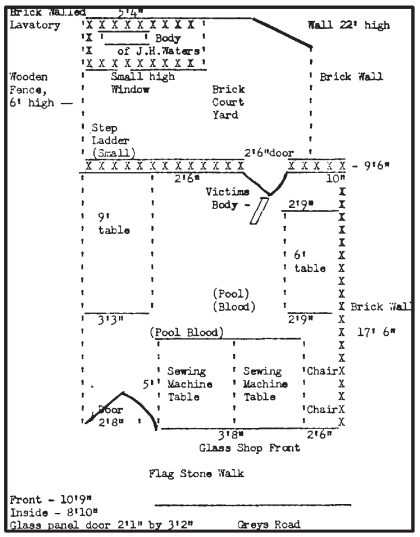
PRIVATE JOHN H. WATERS

Private Waters served with a model-making unit at Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, run jointly with the RAF, where he was one of the Americans sharing guard duties with British airmen. Each guard was issued with a ·38 Smith & Wesson revolver and 12 rounds of ammunition.

In February 1943 he had made the acquaintance of a local girl, Doris Staples, who worked in a dressmaking shop at 11a Greys Road. Over the following weeks a tempestuous relationship developed but by July it appears that Miss Staples' affections were cooling. Intensely jealous of the stories that Doris was seeing other Americans, Waters declared he would commit suicide over her.

On July 14 the normal placidity of Henley was rudely shattered when shots rang out in Greys Road. A strong police detachment was sent to the scene, where they were

Right: **By careful measurement we set up our comparison with Exhibit M *left*. Private Jenkins was initially buried in the temporary American cemetery at Brookwood, Surrey, but was returned to his family in Eltan, Virginia, after the war.**



Six months later another shooting drama took place although this time it was in full public view in Greys Road in Henley; the historic Thames-side town more noted for its rowing regatta. One of the witnesses at the trial worked in the cafe next door to No. 11a which remains almost unchanged although the tailor's shop itself has since been gutted for a showroom for Kitchen Concept Ltd. The outside toilet where Waters tried to shoot himself has disappeared in the extension of the premises.

joined by US military police. The firing had come from the shop at 11a, where witnesses said a man with a gun was holed up. The National Fire Service were called to bring their fire hoses to bear and while doing so two more shots rang out, one shattering the window of the premises opposite. Superintendent Hudson, in charge, then decided to use tear gas to flush out the gunman and a suitable bomb was obtained from the Air Raid Precautions authorities.

Police and MPs wearing respirators then entered the shop, where they found Doris lying dead on the floor with five bullet wounds. Waters was found in the outside toilet, sitting on the seat, leaning against the wall, having bungled an attempt at suicide.

Private Waters was taken to hospital where, in spite of his wound which had shattered his jaw, mouth and palate, the bullet finally coming to rest in the front of his brain, he recovered sufficiently to stand trial for murder although partially blinded in one eye.

At his General Court-Martial convened at Watford on November 29 he was also accused of leaving his guard post and of violating the 96th Article of War in that he wilfully maimed himself thereby unfitting himself for the full performance of his military duty.

At his trial witnesses were called to testify that the accused was depressed over the relationship and unhappy in his posting which resulted in the Americans having to live on the inferior RAF rations. A petition for clemency was received signed by 35 members of his unit as well as one from the local townspeople containing 302 names.

After having been adjudged guilty, all the evidence was re-examined by the Board of Review and the Commanding General of the US forces in Europe, but nothing was found to warrant the commuting of the sentence which was carried out on February 10, 1944. A married man from Perth Amboy, New Jersey, Waters was the oldest man to die at Shepton Mallet, having been born in 1905.

PRIVATE LEE A. DAVIS

Just south of Henley-on-Thames where Doris Staples was murdered, the A4 runs west through Wiltshire to Bristol. South of Swindon it reaches the market town of Marlborough and it was here, in the centre of the road just as it descends London Hill to the town, that the next brutal murder took place which led an American serviceman to the gallows.

On the afternoon of September 28, 1943, Muriel Fawden, a nurse at Savernake Hospital, had gone to the cinema in the town. Leaving about 7.45 p.m. she met a friend, June Lay, and together they began walking back to the hospital.

'We got half-way up the hill to the hospital', testified Miss Fawden at the General Court-Martial held at Tottenham House, Marlborough, in October 1943, 'and a coloured American soldier came up from behind and spoke to us. He said "How far are you going?" We both answered "We are going to the hospital." He said "How far is that?" and I said "Just up there," and with that he dropped behind us again.

'A few minutes afterwards I heard a voice behind us say "Stand still, or I'll shoot" or words to that effect — I can't really remember the exact words. We both turned round, hardly believing our ears, and we saw a coloured American soldier standing levelling a rifle at us.

"He told us to get over the other side of the road, into the bushes. We sort of went towards that side of the road, and tried to stall him. We said we could not get into the bushes because there was barbed wire there, which was a lie — we were trying to stall him. We said it was much better further down the road, so we walked backwards, facing him, down the road, and he still levelled the rifle at us.

'Then June said to me "Run, Muriel;" we both started to run, and then I heard shots. I was in front — I was leading — June behind — and I looked round and June was still running, and I heard more shots, and I

There were three cases in the UK during the war in which American servicemen paid the supreme penalty for the double crime of murder-rape: at Ashford, Kent; Stewartstown, County Tyrone; and here at Marlborough, Wiltshire. If indeed such horrific crimes can be compared, the latter by Private Lee Davis might be considered the most depraved for, having shot June Lay through the back and head, he left her dying in the road while he dragged her friend away at gunpoint. Although June was found by a lorry driver just after 8.00 p.m. it was not until after midnight that Muriel Fawden escaped from her ordeal.

'In loving memory of June Lay, born July 11th, 1924, died Sept. 28th 1943. Ever remembered by all her friends.'

Detective Sergeant Reginald Butler took two photographs, Exhibits A and B, at 12.30 a.m., the second being too awful to include, and two, C and D, the following day. Exhibit E *bottom left* **was taken on October 1 to indicate where certain articles of clothing had been found. One of the search party, Albert Smith, marked it in court with a 'Y' where he found a scarf; Constable Boyer added an 'X' to indicate the spot where he found a US forage cap, and Sergeant Gale a 'Z' for the position of the mackintosh.** *Bottom right:* **Forty years later: where a man forfeited his right to life.**

turned round and June threw up her arms and screamed, and rolled over in the road.

'Well, I then turned my back and started running hard, and I could hear more shots, and had the impression of bullets whistling past me, so I stopped dead in my tracks, because I thought the next one would go in my back. I didn't turn round. I just stayed there as I was, with my back towards him. Then after a few seconds he caught me up and caught hold of my arm and pulled me through the barbed wire — at least, he ordered me to get through the barbed wire, and we crouched there for a few minutes listening.

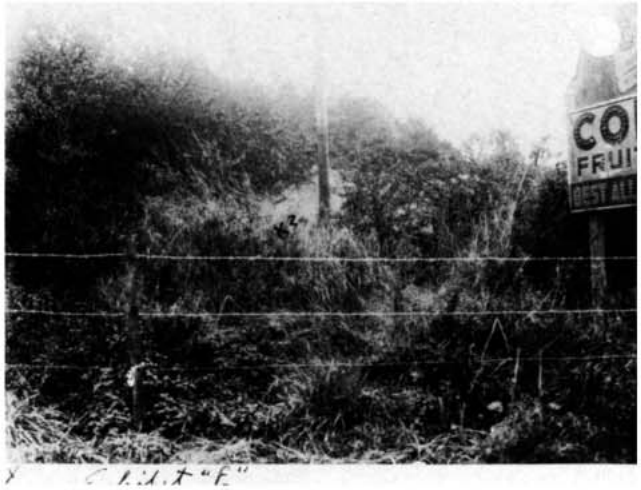
'I had a white mackintosh on, and he stood over me with the gun and said "Take your white coat off. When we run it will show up." I could not take my mackintosh off without taking my gloves off, which I did, and for some reason or other I sort of handed them to him — I mean I don't know why I did it, but I did, and he took them from me, and then I took my mac off and just left it where we were crouching. Then we went further up into the forest, up on the hill into the grass, and stayed there a few minutes listening, and I heard a lorry come down the hill and stop, and I knew June had been found, and I knew that people would start searching for me.

'Then he stood over me with the gun, and he said "Either you do what I want you to do or you die. I am going to count ten." So he started to count ten. I did not want to die, so I had no option but to give in to him.'

The nearest American unit was stationed at Iron Gates Camp and an investigation revealed bloodstained trousers and shirt and a carbine protruding butt upwards from the mud near hut 28. Shortly after midday on September 29 the entire company was assembled in the mess hall, together with their weapons, where each was examined to see if it had been fired. Serial numbers were read off against the number of that issued to each man and clothing, also marked with the first letter of a soldier's name followed by the last four digits of his service number, cross-checked. As a result Private Lee Davis was singled out and arrested.

Forensic tests were carried out by the Metropolitan Police Laboratory on other items of Davis's clothing which were blood-stained, and also those of Miss Fawden. Robert Churchill test fired the carbine 1594722 and matched a cartridge case found in the road to that weapon. In the end Davis admitted the shooting although he claimed he had intended to fire in the air. Found guilty of the murder of Cynthia Lay and having 'forcibly and feloniously against her will had carnal knowledge of Muriel Fawden', Davis was executed on December 14, 1943.

Right or wrong, after having visited the scene of June's murder I have to admit a certain grim satisfaction at subsequently standing on the spot where Davis met his end.



In January 1944 Private Thomas Bell made legal history, becoming the first man to be executed for rape in Britain for nearly 100 years. To retrace the story we took our European Theater 'aficionado' Roger Bell to Burton-on-Trent to follow the route taken by the other Bell on the evening of October 3, 1943.

Left: **From 9.00-10.30 p.m. he was drinking at The Star, renamed in 1976.** *Right:* **Memorial Park — the convoy to take the men back to Sudbury was drawn up some 50 yards away. It was here that Bell first accosted Ivy Cranfield sitting on a bench with her boyfriend.**

PRIVATE THOMAS BELL

On October 3, 1943, just before Davis's court-martial, another rape by an American soldier took place, this time in Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire. Private Bell was on the strength of the 390th Engineer Regiment and had taken the R&R convoy from his camp at Sudbury arriving at Burton during the afternoon. That evening Bell visited the Star pub and at closing time approached a group of young people sitting on a bench in Memorial Park: 17-year-old Ivy Cranfield, her friend Dorothy Ford aged 16, with their boy friends John Blackshaw aged 19 and a British soldier, George Price. When Ivy and John left to walk down the path to Litchfield Street, a 'big coloured soldier', Private Bell, followed. When they told him to go away he seized her arm, and produced a razor. Two other soldiers came up and Bell told them to 'take care' of John Blackshaw. They held the 19-year-old's arms while Bell took Ivy down Abbey Street where he said: 'Will you give me sugar?'

Reaching some houses on Fleet Street, they met a young girl, Margaret Harfield. Ivy caught hold of her arm and cried: 'Oh save me'. Holding her all the time, Bell took Ivy on into Green Street and over the wall by the flood gates to the river. There, it was alleged, the crime took place.

Private Bell was picked out at a police identity parade by Price and Blackshaw from over 200 coloured troops but at the General Court-Martial convened in the town the following month there was conflicting evidence introduced as to whether Miss Cranfield had gone willingly with the soldier. However, the testimony of John Blackshaw that Ivy had been forcibly taken away was paramount, and 23-year-old Private Bell became the first American to die at Shepton Mallet solely for rape when he entered the execution chamber on January 31, 1944.

PRIVATE J. C. LEATHERBERRY

The crime for which Private Leatherberry was hung has since been labelled by criminologists as the 'Birch taxi-cab murder'. It was solved as a result of a remarkable piece of investigation work by Detective-Superintendent G. H. Totterdell of the Essex Police. Before he died in 1976 his memoirs were published under the title of *Country Copper*:

'At 10 p.m. on Wednesday, December 8, 1943, I received a telephone message from the police at Clacton-on-Sea to say that a Vauxhall taxi-cab, CPU 602, had been found abandoned by Police Constable 505 McCormack, in Haynes Green Lane, Layer Marney, containing a jacket and bloodstained mackintosh.

'With Detective Inspector Draper I went at once to Copford Police Station, where I conferred with Sergeant Garrett, who had been to Haynes Green Lane and brought back the clothes with him.

'I examined them and found that the sleeves of the jacket were turned inside out and looped together as if the garment had been pulled off the wearer from behind. There was what appeared to be bloodstains on the back of the mackintosh near the collar. Neither of the garments were torn, and the mackintosh appeared to be new.

'In the pockets I found a motor driving licence in the name of Henry Claude Hailstone and a taxi-cab driver's plate No. 842. From the address we found on the licence, 127 Maldon Road, Colchester, we interviewed Hailstone's landlady, Mrs Pearce; and she identified the clothing as her lodger's. She said that she had last seen him at ten minutes past eleven on the night of December 7, 1943.

'With Inspector Draper I then set off for

Left: **Board of Review: 'Accused took the girl down Abbey Street to the rear gates of an inn where he said: "Will you give me sugar?" When she asked him what he meant he replied: "Don't try and be funny. Remember I still have the knife in your back."'**

Right: **'Holding her all the time he took her . . . into Green Street near some flood gates. Just before they reached a wall she escaped from him but slipped . . . He threatened to kill her and put her on top of the wall. He then climbed over the wall and pulled her down.'**

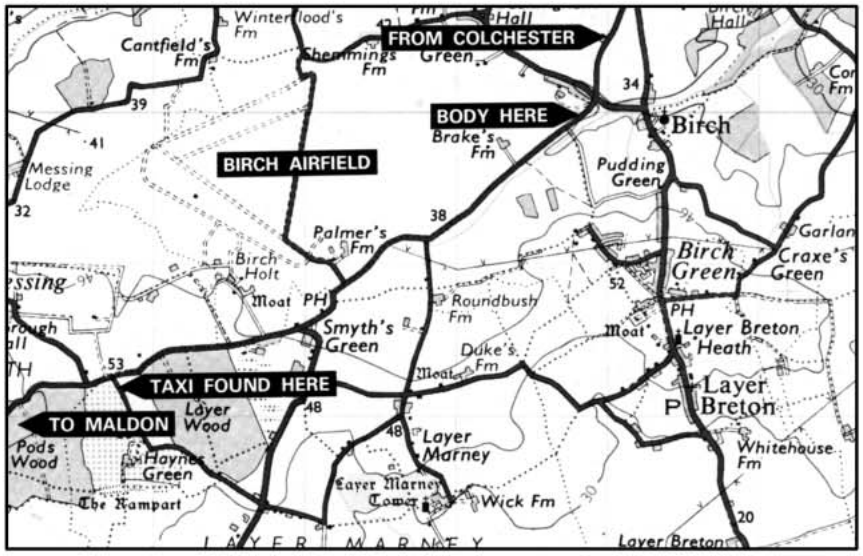
Private J. C. (his Christian names do not appear anywhere in American records) Leatherberry and Private George Fowler were stationed with the 356th Engineer General Service Regiment at Birch near Colchester where an airfield was being constructed for the United States Army Air Forces. On Sunday evening, December 5, 1943, they decided to go AWOL to London, not returning until Tuesday evening having spent almost all their money. Leatherberry proposed the idea of taking a cab at Colchester and robbing the driver on the way back to camp. The unfortunate driver waiting in his Vauxhall outside the station was Harry Hailstone. Reaching this spot on the B1022 Fowler asked the driver to stop to relieve himself. Fowler maintained at his court-martial that it was while he was out of the taxi that Leatherberry then killed the driver.

Haynes Green Lane to inspect the cab. Arrived there, I found the windows closed, and the headlight and rear lights still switched on. . . . Though the car was on the wrong side of the road, it appeared to have stopped naturally. There were no signs of a struggle on the road or the grass verge, but I found a sixpence wedged between the offside running board and the body of the car.

'But the interior of the cab showed clear evidence of a struggle having taken place. Personal papers belonging to Hailstone were strewn about the floor. The leather upholstery was badly scratched. One piece near the driver's seat was hanging down, together with the telephone flex that ran along the roof to the rear of the car, and a string parcel-net had been torn down. Hailstone's empty wallet, his brown leather gloves, and another sixpenny piece were on the floor. On the rear seat there was a clot of blood and on the inside of the offside window a number of small blood spots.

'There seemed to my mind very little doubt that Hailstone had been attacked from the rear while on his journey from Colchester and that his assailant had afterwards driven his cab to where it had been abandoned. That the cab had been drawn up on the right side of the road seemed to indicate that his passenger could have been an American.

'A search in the immediate vicinity was



Carrying the body across the road they rolled it under the wire fence surrounding Birch rectory where a low bank would hide it from view. *Below left:* **The position where Hailstone was discovered two days later was marked in this scene-of-crime photo with an X.** *Right:* **The exact spot can be established today just sixty yards from the gate to what is now Greenacres Childrens' Home.**

Left: **Hailstone's taxi was found abandoned close to the airfield parked on the wrong side of the road — an immediate clue that it had not been left there by a British driver.** *Right:* **That spot was here: 50 yards from the Colchester-Maldon road down Haynes Green Lane.**

made for Hailstone's body. We found no trace of it. A wide systematic search was then made, concentrating on the road leading to the five American Army camps, which included many coloured troops, in the neighbourhood of Birch. The Garrison adjutant at Colchester was contacted, and he brought eighteen of his men to assist us. Later two members of the Investigation Staff of the American Forces at Ipswich arrived to assist in the inquiry.

'On December 8 a civilian-pattern mackintosh, considerably bloodstained down the front, with the words "Captain J. J. Weber" written near the collar-band, was found lying in the gutter of the main road to Maldon, near Tollesbury. In one of the outside pockets was a new cloth American Service emblem and on the inside of the coat a Canadian maker's label. The coat was found six miles farther along the Maldon Road from Haynes Green Lane, where the taxi was first discovered.

'We got in touch with Canadian Army Headquarters in London in order to ascertain if any officer of the name of Weber was serving in this country, but at first drew a blank. But later information came through that an officer, J. J. Weber, was attached to the Canadian General Hospital at Cuckfield, in Sussex. He was interviewed by the Sussex C.I.D. and made a statement.

'On December 5 he had been stationed at 18th Canadian General Hospital, Cherry Tree Camp, at Colchester, completing a course. On returning to camp from London he had met a coloured sergeant of the American Forces at Liverpool Street Station, and they had struck up an acquaintance. Arriving at Colchester, he had invited the sergeant back to his mess for a drink. During his temporary absence from his room the American had absconded with a bottle of whisky and his mackintosh (the one in question). In the pockets of the latter were five pounds in notes, a Rolex wrist-watch, a torch, and a pair of gloves.

'At 12.55 midday on Thursday, December 9, Police Constable Snowling of Copford, who was one of the search party, found the dead body of Henry Claude Hailstone. The body was lying on the side of a bank in the grounds of Birch Rectory, which forms the boundary between the Maldon Road going from Colchester in the direction of the American camps and the Rectory. I went immediately to the place.

'The dead man was fully clad, with the exception of hat, jacket, and overcoat. The left-hand pocket was turned inside out. The head was pointing towards Maldon, the left of the face badly injured and the features covered with blood. The body was invisible from the road. Two strands of barbed wire ran along the top of the bank. The bottom strand opposite to where the body was found was partly bloodstained. There were no signs nearby of a struggle or footprints or the impression of tyres.

'I was not of the opinion that Hailstone had been killed at this spot, and, since he weighed between eleven and twelve stone, it seemed reasonable to assume that more than one person had been needed to deposit the body.'

When Superintendent Totterdell followed up Captain Weber's explanation of how he had lost his raincoat at the 18th Canadian General Hospital at Colchester, the mess orderly remembered the incident and handed over a gas mask which had been left behind by the coloured American soldier. Inside the flap was the name 'J. Hill'. The owner was traced to E Company of the 356th Engineer Regiment stationed at Birch, but Private Hill stated that he had given the item to another coloured soldier by the name of Fowler.

When Private George Fowler was interviewed he said he had left the mask at the Liberty Club in Euston Square during a day-pass to London. His story did not ring true and he was held on suspicion while his hut was searched. In his kit bag a pawn ticket for a Rolex watch was found with the customer being given as Charlie Huntley of the 356 Engineers. Huntley, also coloured, said that he had been given the watch by another serviceman he had met at the West Indies Club, a Private Leatherberry.

Once Captain Weber had confirmed that the watch was his, Fowler was again questioned. Totterdell recalled that his confidence now appeared to be shaken and he admitted that on the way back from London Leatherberry had suggested they should hire a taxi at Colchester and rob the driver on the way back to camp. He said that he had left the cab to relieve himself while Leatherberry remained inside and that it was he who had strangled the driver from behind.

Private Leatherberry denied being with Fowler on the night of the crime but he was arrested when a bloodstained shirt, pants and vest were found in his possession. These he tried to explain away as having been caused by a fight or sexual intercourse and he remained obdurate and, as Totterdell wrote, 'shut up like a clam'.

Statements were taken from people in London to disprove Leatherberry's contention that he spent the night of December 7 in London, and the Hendon Police Laboratory examined all the clothing and finger-nail scrapings from both men.

On December 19, both suspects were handed over by the Essex force to the commanding officer of the 356th Engineers together with all the statements and forensic evidence and the General Court-Martial of both Fowler and Leatherberry opened in Ipswich Town Hall on January 19, 1944.

Fowler's testimony was the only direct evidence of the commission of the crime, and although he was also found guilty of the murder of Harry Hailstone, the court sentenced him to life imprisonment. For Leatherberry on the other hand, adjudged the wilful perpetrator of the murder, it was an appointment with Pierrepont at Shepton Mallet on March 16, 1944.

Fowler *(left)* was sentenced to life imprisonment; Leatherberry to the gallows.

Sergeant James Hall of the US military police retraces the sequence of events in Brookside Lane on March 4, 1944. *Left:* **Exhibit 2 where the knickers were found and** *below* **Exhibit 12 where the drag marks began.**

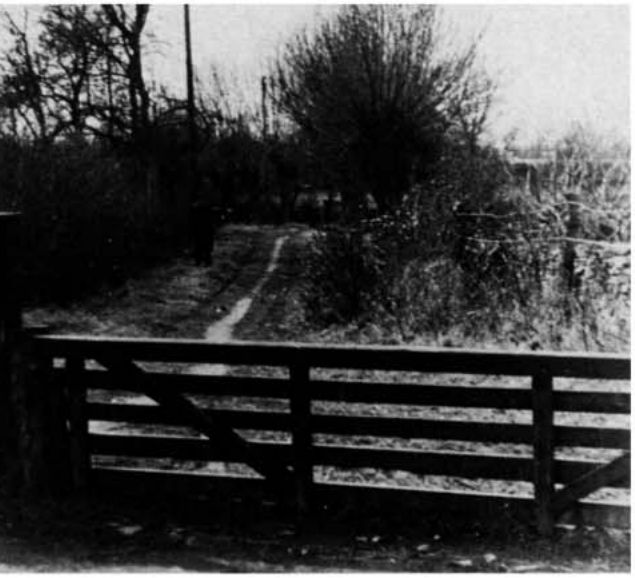
PRIVATE ELIGA BRINSON
PRIVATE WILLIE SMITH

By March 1944 the build-up of forces for the invasion was in full swing. The American zone of operations was largely in the south-west of England and it was here at Bishop's Cleeve in Gloucestershire that the next capital crime was committed. Both men were members of the 4090th Quartermaster Service Company in the Services of Supply, redesignated for Operation Overlord the Communication Zone of the ETO, and the pair were put on trial at a General Court-Martial at Cheltenham on April 28–29, 1944 for raping Dorothy Holmes.

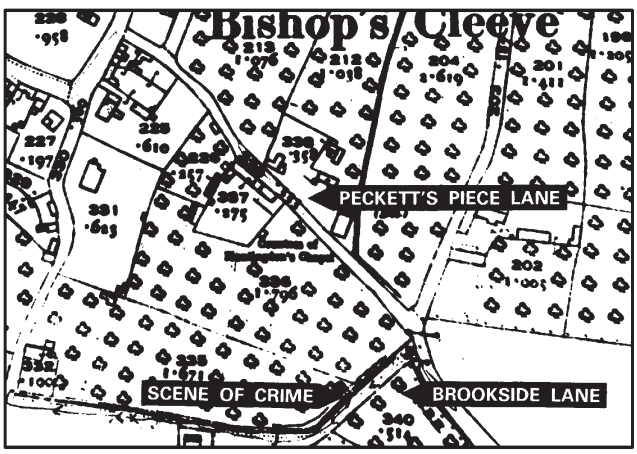
The pattern of the incident was very similar to that which had taken place the previous October in Burton-on-Trent. On the evening of Sunday, March 4, 1944 the two coloured soldiers followed a local girl and her American boy friend as they left a dance. The boy friend in this case was Private First Class Edward Hefferman, who was hit in the face with a bottle as he stood talking with Miss Holmes near the gate at the end of Brookside Lane shortly after midnight. While he ran for help, she was pushed over the gate, whereupon both men carried her across a brook and laid her down in an allotment. They then took it in turns to hold her down while the other assaulted her.

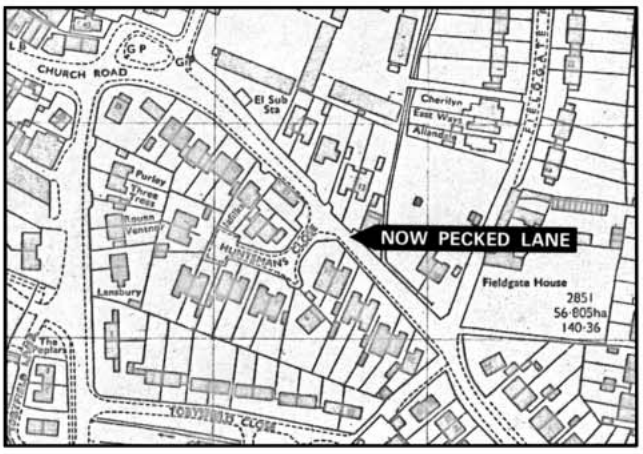
As snow lay on the ground, Constable William Hale and Sergeant James Hall of the 255th Military Police Company were able to trace the entire course of events — the scene of the struggle marked by a broken mineral water bottle, footprints going down Peckett's Piece Lane to the gate, drag marks down Brookside Lane, and scuffle marks in the allotment. Casts were made of the footprints and peculiarities in the footwear of the two men pinpointed those concerned.

Both soldiers were found guilty, and hanged on August 11, 1944.



The Bishop's Cleeve case caused us the greatest problem in pinpointing the scene of the crime out of all the sixteen crimes we investigated and three visits were necessary before we were able to take a comparison. The problem we faced can be seen from comparing the extract from the pre-war Ordnance map *below left* **— the actual one used at the court-martial to establish the route taken by Dorothy Holmes — with its present day equivalent. Since the war the town has been developed out of all recognition and on our first two visits no one we spoke to could recall where the crime had been committed or where Brookside Lane once lay. Only after we obtained the plan from the United States Army Judiciary were we able to overlay it and find the spot (***top right***). The top end of the 'Lane' still exists although now just a small path without a name. The brook which ran along the side has been piped underground but remarkably the service poles still remain.**





The interior of the 42nd Field Artillery Battalion hut at Broomhill Camp at Honiton, Devon. In the left rear, next to the door with the black-out curtain, is the top bunk of Sergeant Thomas Evison. In the right foreground marked with an X is the top bunk of Private Miranda. The carbine he used to kill Evison was taken from the rack behind the stove.

PRIVATE ALEX F. MIRANDA

Almost at the same time that Dorothy Holmes was being raped at Bishop's Cleeve, a hundred miles to the south in Honiton, Private Alex Miranda was picked up by Special Sergeant Bill Durbin and Constable North of the Devonshire Police for urinating in the street. He was taken to Honiton Police Station about 12.15 a.m. and held until transport arrived to take him back to camp. While Sergeant Durbin reported that he was drunk, although not so drunk that he did not know what he was doing, he was nasty and abusive in general. Miranda said to Durbin: 'You are a fine fat sergeant. I would make you top sergeant. Come on guard tomorrow night and I will give you a royal welcome.' When a group of men left the station to get some sergeants who had been involved in an accident, Miranda remarked: 'I hope they rip their guts out,' and then said to Durbin: 'I was not pissing in the street. You are lying. I will rip your guts out.' Sergeant Durbin later testified that Private Miranda 'seemed to have sergeants on his mind'.

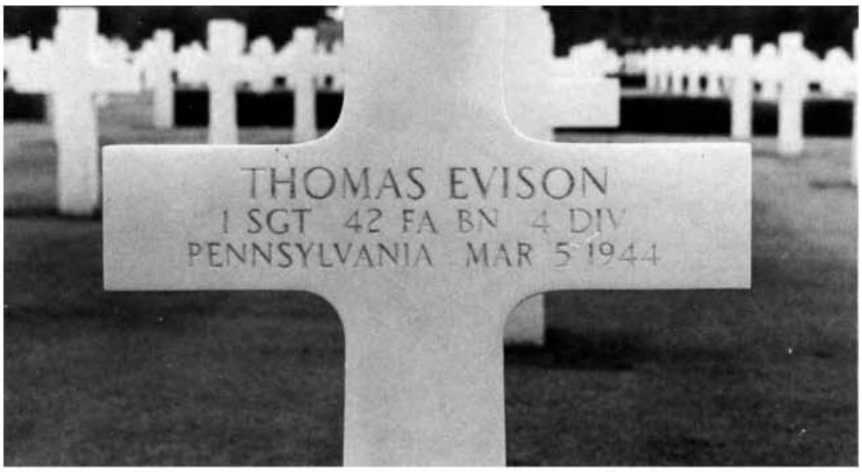
Within fifteen minutes Corporal Joel Wehking of the 42nd Field Artillery Battalion had arrived with a driver to take Miranda back to the guardroom at Broomhill Camp. As he was not incapable of walking, he was then allowed to return to his hut.

Entering his billet in a 'noisy boisterous manner' he mouthed a few choice words about the 1st Sergeant who was asleep. Within minutes a shot rang out, galvanising the sleeping soldiers from their bunks. 'Your worries are over now boys', laughed Miranda hysterically, I have shot the 1st Sergeant and I'll turn on the lights so I can show you.'

When found guilty of murder at his General Court-Martial on March 20 it was really an open and shut case. There were no mitigating circumstances in what was adjudged a premeditated cold-blooded killing and unusually, and for the first time in the UK, the court sentenced Miranda to suffer death by musketry. He was shot at Shepton Mallet on May 30, 1944.

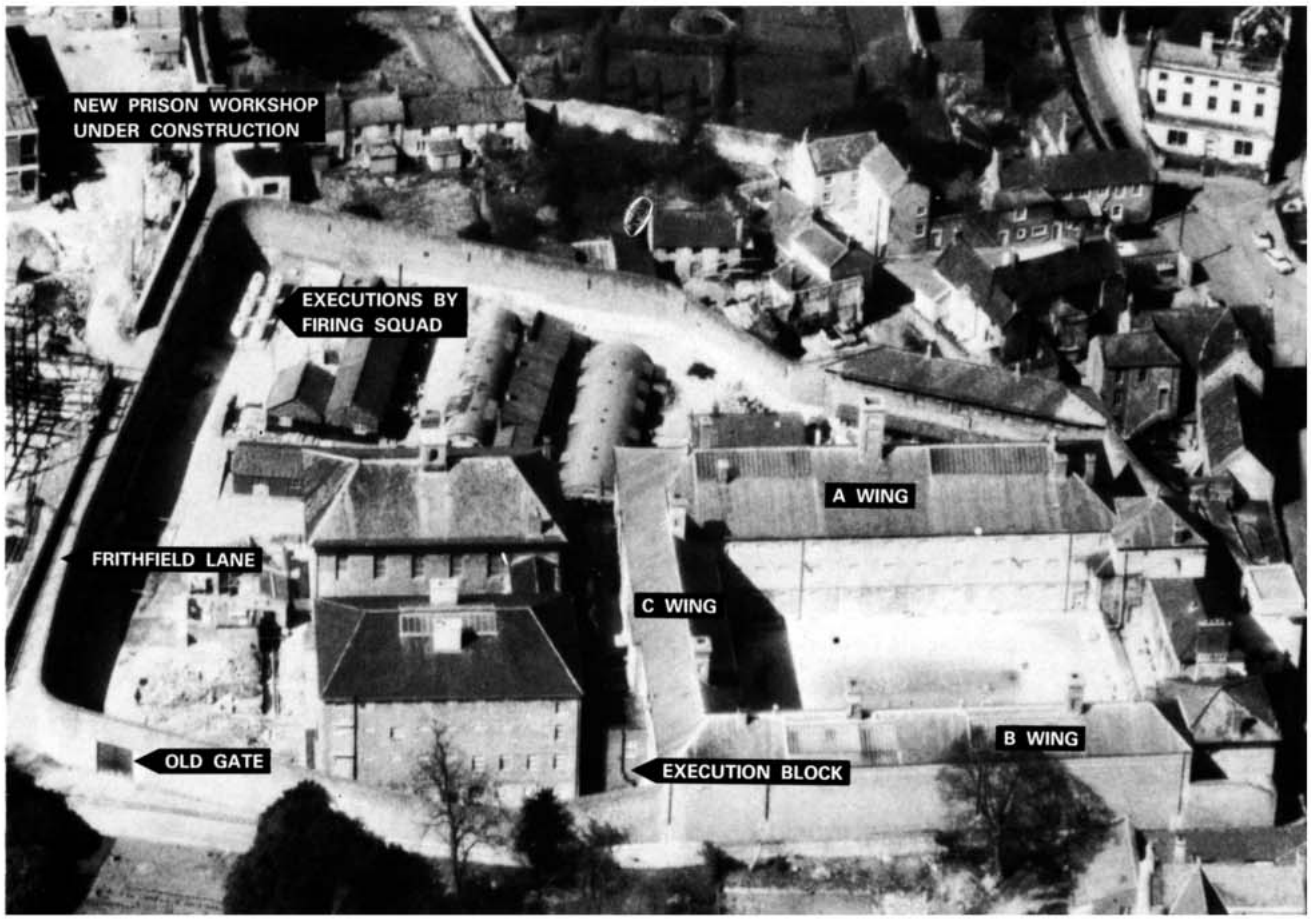
PRIVATE WILEY HARRIS JR

March 1944 was indeed a black month for killings by American servicemen. The following evening, Monday, March 6, Private Wiley Harris and Private Robert Fils were on an evening pass from the 626th Ordnance Ammunition Company based in Belfast, Northern Ireland. After drinking some wine and beer in York Street they went down to the Diamond Bar in North Queen Street where they had a number of glasses of Guinness. Wiley was approached by a civilian, Harry Coogan, who asked if he wanted a woman. When Wiley replied 'Yes' he



First buried in the temporary cemetery at Brookwood (Plot O, Row 9, Grave 1), he now lies at Cambridge in Plot C, Row 5, Grave 42.

Nothing remains of the camp today, the field which belongs to the local Catholic church being let to a farmer for grazing.



Miranda chalked up a first when he was sentenced to death by firing squad. Death by shooting was an option available at the discretion of the court, usually invoked if the victim was a fellow serviceman, but there is nothing in the records to explain why Cobb and Harold Smith, who also killed American soldiers, had previously been hung. The execution was carried out in the outer yard at Shepton Mallet but as no backstop had been provided the stone wall produced some dangerous ricochets. Therefore for the second 'execution by musketry' six months later (Private Pygate see page 42), Bill Pyle supervised the construction of a large wooden box filled with earth to absorb the impact of the bullets. (Aerofilms picture taken 1971)

pointed to a girl, Eileen Megaw, and said 'If you want to go out with the girl I will get her for you.' Miss Megaw, who later described the American as a 'negro soldier of slight build, a high brown not too dark', agreed a price of £1. Coogan said he knew where they could go.

Leading the way to an air raid shelter at the top of Earl Street across the road from the bar, he agreed to wait outside 'in case the police would come'. Coogan held a torch while Harris handed over the money in silver. He went into the shelter and laid his overcoat on the floor but before 'I could do what I intended to do', Coogan shouted that the police were coming. Somewhat annoyed, Harris went outside and flashed the torch up and down the road. By this time Miss Megaw had also joined him, rather frightened.

With no sign of the police, Harris asked her to return inside the shelter but she refused. He then asked for his money but Coogan told her not to give it back. When the girl started to run she dropped the coins and as Harris started to pick them up Coogan struck him on the cheek. At this Harris pulled out his jack-knife and lunged at Coogan and in the fight that ensued the Irishman fell dead from seventeen stab wounds.

Although the defence at the subsequent General Court-Martial asked for a lesser verdict of guilty of voluntary manslaughter, the number of wounds and the ferocity of the attack led the court to find Harris guilty of murder. His execution took place at Shepton Mallet on May 26, 1944.

Left: **The knifing of Harry Coogan took place here outside this air raid shelter at the top of Earl Street, Belfast. The Diamond Bar can be seen behind the inquisitive children on North Queen Street.** *Below:* **The church was already in ruins in 1944 and the pub disappeared in the mid-1970s. A depressing area scheduled for redevelopment.**

Drill Hall Camp was based around the old Territorial Army hall in West End Road. We were told that initially the men were quartered at the Quartermaster Depot itself (now redeveloped as the West Wilts Trading Estate) on the edge of Westbury but that it was too cold for the 'darkies' who were brought into town. One of the old huts still remains behind the hall, now the Westbury Cadet Centre, although whether this is Hut No. 2 where the murder took place is open to question as no scene-of-crime plan exists in Pygate's court-martial file.

Private Alexander's grave can be found in Row 3 of Plot B at Cambridge.

PRIVATE BENJAMIN PYGATE

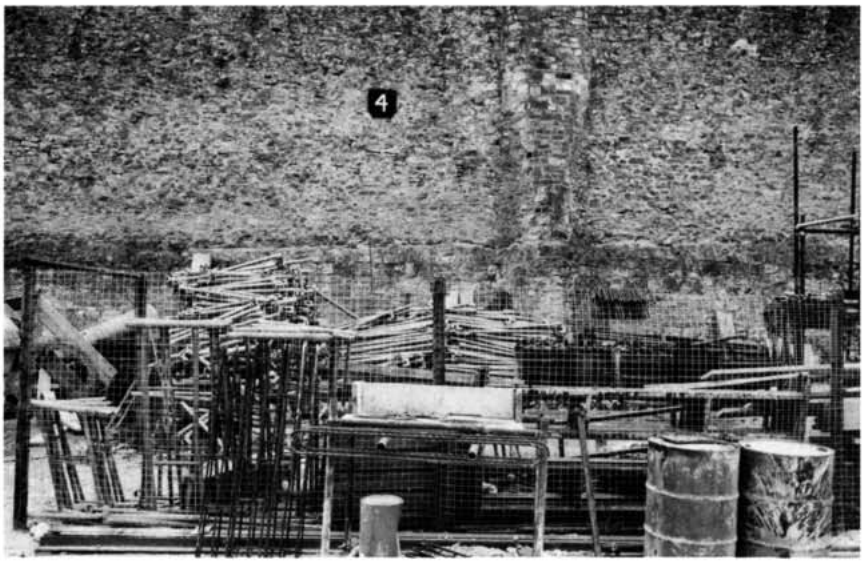
The 960th Quartermaster Service Company was stationed at Drill Hall Camp in Westbury, Wiltshire, in the Southern Base Section of the Communications Zone. The camp was located in West End Road where a series of huts had been erected behind the Territorial Army Drill Hall.

On the evening of June 17, 1944 soldiers of the company were drinking beer in the recreational hall. Private Pygate of Dillon, South Carolina, came in late just as the bar had closed. Annoyed at not being able to get a drink, he stormed off to his barrack hut where a noisy argument broke out in which Private First Class James E. Alexander (not the bartender) was fatally stabbed in the throat.

Pygate was arraigned before a General Court-Martial at Tidworth on July 15 at which he was found guilty of murder and sentenced to be shot. A Board of Review re-examined the evidence which recorded 'that the accused and deceased were members of a group of colored soldiers who had been consuming beer at their camp recreation hall during the evening. When the hour for closing arrived the soldier who acted as bartender refused to serve beer to the deceased who assumed a threatening attitude. It is not clear whether the refusal of the bartender to serve beer was the primary cause of the quarrelsome argument which simultaneously arose among the soldiers but the existence of such argument was clearly established. Privates Roy Easley, C. A. Dempsey and the deceased appear to have been foremost in the disorder. Deceased and Easley left the hall and went to their barracks, hut No. 2. Easley possessed himself of a bottle and in company with deceased left this hut and stood outside thereof in front of the doorway. In the meantime, the other soldiers left the recreation hall and gathered in front of hut No. 2. They continued the noisy argument. Dempsey carried a poker. Violent words passed between him and Easley and there were indications that a fight might ensue between them. Accused prior to this time had evidently been inactive. He stood on deceased's right hand; Easley stood to deceased's left. At this juncture accused said to deceased "Get back in that hut before I kill you." He then stepped past deceased, took the bottle from Easley, turned and kicked deceased violently in the right groin. As deceased fell back against the door and then bent forward as a result of the kick he received from accused, the latter pulled a knife from the right rear pocket of his trousers and plunged it into the deceased's neck, inflicting the fatal wound.'

The findings of the Board of Review were that 'the court was legally constituted and had jurisdiction of the person and offense. No errors injuriously affecting the substantial rights of accused were committed during the trial. The Board of Review is of the opinion that the record of trial is legally sufficient to support the findings of guilty and the sentence.'

This was duly carried out in the courtyard of Shepton Mallet prison on November 28, 1944.



Private Pygate met his death before the firing party drawn up facing area 4 in the outer yard.

Although the trial records give the location of the rape of Mrs Beatrice Reynolds as Gunnislake (which lies just over the Devon-Cornwall border on the main A390 from Tavistock to Liskeard), it actually took place in neighbouring Albaston. The local bobby, Police Constable J. H. Elliott was closely involved in the investigation and, although he retired in 1959 and never revisited the scene, when we contacted him he still clearly recalled the events of July 1944: 'The then-British Legion hall was situated opposite the car park of the Rifle Volunteer inn but was moved several years ago. Mrs Reynolds was a highly respected person, a widow in her 60s, her late husband being in the Royal Navy and lost in the battle of Jutland. Dances were held regularly for the welfare of the American troops in the area and it was in her capacity as chairman that she attended the dance at the British Legion hall on the night the offence took place. . . .'

'She was walking to her home in Gnaton Terrace, Albaston when she was lifted up from behind and thrown over the hedge in Albaston Hill and very savagely and brutally raped. Going down the hill from the main road the scene was on the right-hand side. . . .'

'There was a hedge some four or five feet high and I would describe the ground on the inside (the scene) as more of a piece of waste land, overgrown at that time with long grass. There was a wood post and wire fence on the lower side. It was here that the crime took place.'

PRIVATE MADISON THOMAS

The next crime to end in a death sentence was also committed in the Southern Base Section by a member of a Quartermaster Service Company, this time the 964th based at Tavistock, Devon.

At the General Court-Martial held at Plymouth on August 21, 1944 the charge against Private Madison Thomas was that he 'did at Gunnislake, Cornwall, England, on or about 26 July 1944, forcibly and feloniously, against her will, have carnal knowledge of Beatrice Maud Reynolds.'

The undisputed testimony for the prosecution was that Mrs Reynolds, a widow of the last war, lived in Gunnislake and kept house for an invalid brother. She was active in the British Legion, being chairman of the local branch. She testified that she left the hall at about 10.40 p.m. on the evening of July 26 alone, to return home. As she did, a coloured soldier appeared walking by her side and asked if she had far to go. She replied 'No' and suggested he had better hurry on to catch his ride back to his camp, as she did not care for his company. Thinking that the soldier would go on, she stopped to talk to Miss Jean Elizabeth Blight who was sitting just outside her home. The American went on down the road and Mrs Reynolds thought he had gone. However, he returned to speak to Miss Blight and to ask her to 'kiss him goodnight'.

Meanwhile Mrs Reynolds had gone on her way. As she came to the loneliest part of the hill, to her surprise the soldier again appeared and asked if she had far to go. She gave him a definite 'no', when, to her horror, he seized her and, despite her struggles, picked her up and put her over a hedge. She pleaded with him, saying she was old enough to be his mother but his answer was that 'that didn't make any difference'. He wrenched her gold wrist watch from her arm and said he would return it when she gave him all he desired. When she replied, 'That will never be boy,' he struck her a heavy blow on the side of the head that 'sort of stupefied me for a bit'. Mrs Reynolds later told the court that she remembered 'going to the ground' and his ripping her underclothes off. She pleaded and prayed and reminded him of his own parents, but he said he had none. He dragged her, still struggling, further in the field. She tried to scream for help but 'he clutched' her throat and she thought she was dying and became 'sort of semi-conscious'. The soldier had a knife with a very sharp point which he held up to her throat. After he had completed the act of intercourse, he showed her a ·30 calibre carbine bullet and said: 'You see this bullet, if you make any attempt to run, you'll get it.' He pulled her to her feet and then quickly disappeared.

At 4.30 p.m. on July 27 the entire company of Whitchurch Down Camp was lined up for an identification parade and Thomas was immediately picked out by Miss Blight. Examination of his clothing revealed blood on his trousers which Dr Frederick Hocking of the Royal Cornwall Infirmary said was of the same group as Mrs Reynolds and could not be that of Thomas himself.

Private Thomas was found guilty and hung at Shepton Mallet on October 12, 1944.

PRIVATE ANICETO MARTINEZ

The violent attack on Mrs Reynolds was followed two weeks later with an even worse incident when a frail old woman, 75-year-old Mrs Agnes Cope, was raped in her small cottage at 15 Sandy Lane, Rugeley, Staffordshire.

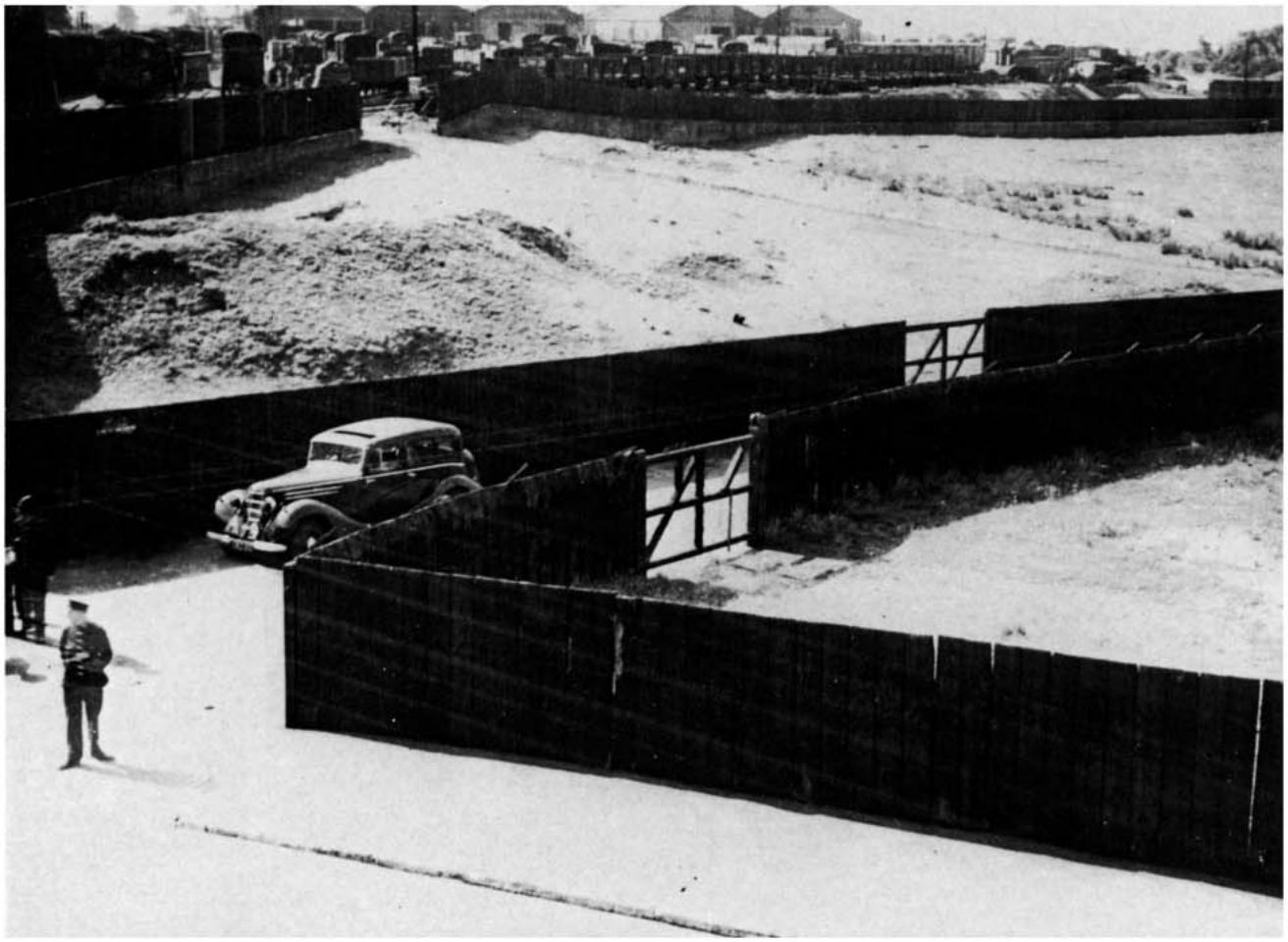
At 3.15 a.m. on August 6 she awoke when she heard a noise on her stairs. Suddenly a man appeared at her doorway, 'a big man in khaki clothes and a hat with a black peak'. 'Whatever do you want?' she cried. 'If it is money you want, I haven't got it.' The man replied: 'I don't want money. You know what I want. It be a woman I want.' His speech sounded American although Mrs Cope did not see his face.

Mrs Cope arrived at the police station around 7.30 a.m. where she was examined by the police surgeon, Dr. L. D. Roberts. American guards were stationed at the local prisoner-of-war camp and examination of the midnight bed check revealed that only one man had been recorded as absent the previous night — Private Aniceto Martinez. When arrested by Inspector Horace Brooks of the Staffordshire Police, Martinez admitted the crime and said that he 'had had some drink. I was not drunk. I was sick near the house.' He said that he thought it was a house of ill repute.

Forensic examination of his clothes revealed fibres which had come from Mrs Cope's bedroom and a finding of guilty was sustained by the Board of Review which examined the records of the General Court-Martial held at Lichfield on February 21, 1945. He was executed on June 15.

Private Martinez came from Vallecitos, New Mexico, to Rugeley, Staffordshire, where he was one of the Headquarters Detachment of the US Prisoner of War Inclosure No. 2. At his court-martial, the rape of Mrs Cope was variously described as 'heinous', 'bestial' and 'sub-human' because of the age of his victim although Brigadier General McNeil, when he signed the Board of Review recommendation to General Eisenhower, noted that because of the darkness and his intoxication, it was unlikely the accused knew this. All the cottages in Sandy Lane have since been demolished. I am standing on the approximate site of No. 15.

By mid-1944, a month after the invasion of Europe, Shepton Mallet was holding over 600 offenders and Lieutenant Colonel James C. Cullens, who had taken over command of the 2912th DTC on June 14, 1943 from Major DeMuth, reported that his greatest problem was finding sufficient space to house the prisoners. Additional accommodation for lesser offenders was found at Langport 20 miles away but the hard-core recalcitrants remained at Shepton. With the opening of the front in France, a review of the whole system of imprisonment was carried out and, as a result, commanders exercising court-martial jurisdiction were directed to make full use of suspension of sentences and were instructed that confinement was not to be resorted to (except for the most serious crimes) until all other methods of making a disciplined soldier had failed. Unit guardhouses were to be established for Garrison Prisoners who would no longer be sent to Disciplinary Training Centers, two more of which were set up in Le Mans and Paris. Commanders were also warned to be aware of soldiers seeking imprisonment as a means of avoiding hazardous duty and shirkers were to have their sentences remitted or be granted parole where it was in the best interests of the service. During August 1944 two prisoners were executed at Shepton: Brimson and Willie Smith found guilty of the Bishop's Cleeve rape in March. *Left:* This is the execution chamber as viewed from outside with the mortuary on the left. After each hanging the body would be taken out from the room below the trapdoor through this outer door *right*, and an ambulance would back up to this corner to take the body away for burial.



The scene from the bridge crossing New Town Road in Ashford on the morning of August 23, 1944. The police car stands at the end of the Black Path which leads back beside the old cricket field to the Smiths Arms. Betty Green's home lies a few hundred yards up New Town Road to the left, but instead of reaching it she lies where Clarke and Guerra left her close to the fence to the right of the gate.

CORPORAL ERNEST LEE CLARK
PRIVATE AUGUSTINE M. GUERRA

The catalogue of rapes during the summer of 1944 continued, but it was not just coloured servicemen who were involved. The next case concerned two men of the 306th Fighter Control Squadron who accosted a 15-year-old girl late on the evening of August 22 as she cycled to her home in New Town Road, Ashford, Kent.

At 7.15 a.m. the next morning a railway worker on the Hastings line bridge 'noticed something lying like a body' in the Old Cricket Field which was separated from the bridge by a track known as the Black Path. Together with another railway employee he went into the overgrown field, where they found the body of a girl lying close to the fence.

The police were called and an inspector of the Kent Constabulary took scene-of-crime photographs and Dr Frederick Newall was called in to examine the body. Dr Keith Simpson, pathologist at Guy's Hospital, London, was summoned to make a further examination. He found parts of her clothing disarranged, the skirt being lifted so the lower hem was above the knees. The left shoe was lying beside the body. Certain hairs and fibres were removed from various parts of the body. Later, at the mortuary, he removed the clothing and examined the body in detail.

'The injuries to the neck were as follows', testified Dr Simpson. 'There was a single deep-seated bruise on the right side of the neck, the deceased's right side. It lay immediately under the angle of the jaw on the side and there was also near to it a number of scratches or other marks, On the opposite side of the neck I found four rounded or oval bruises, the whole group being, in my view, very much in keeping with the tight application of a right hand from in front. . . . The voice box was not fractured but some bruising was present behind it as a result of it being pressed against the spine. Intense asphyxial changes were developed in the lungs and the heart, but in keeping with death, asphyxia due to manual strangulation

When construction of the Channel Tunnel was begun in the 1970s, the two warehouses in the background, part of Ashford Railway Works, were refurbished for casting the concrete liner sections and an access road laid down which bisected the Black Path. When the tunnel project was abandoned the buildings were let go and the area turned over to car-breaking. Although the fence built of railway sleepers has gone, the two gateposts on the left of the path remain.

Poor Betty, just 15 years old. . . . equally a casualty of war.

Her last resting place: an unmarked plot in Willesborough.

by the hand. . . . [with] the same condition of asphyxia present of head and neck.'

Meanwhile the girl had been identified as Betty Green by her father. He had been at the Smiths Arms — some 200 yards from the murder spot — and he recalled that two Americans had been at the pub the previous evening. They had left just before him and as he walked behind them he saw them turn towards the Black Path. Later at an identification parade he picked out the men he had seen.

On August 25 the *Kentish Express* released the first news of the killing, stating that three American soldiers were suspects.

Betty Green's clothing and the hair samples had been sent to the Metropolitan Police Laboratory at Hendon where they were examined by Dr Henry Walls. The clothing of the two men identified by Mr Green — Private Augustine Guerra and Corporal Ernest Clark — was also examined and hair samples compared to those found on the dead girl. Faced with the damning forensic evidence, both confessed that they had met a girl. Clark admitted that he had approached her and asked her to go for a walk. When he picked her up to carry her into the field she had started to scream and Guerra put his hand over her mouth. They then admitted that they had laid her against the fence and taken turns in raping her.

On returning to camp Guerra had asked Clark if there was anything wrong with the girl after he left her lying on the ground. Clark told him he didn't think so as her heart was still beating. He thought she had fainted and after a rest she would be all right again.

Justice was meted out at the General Court-Martial held in Ashford Town Hall, since the construction of a new civic centre, converted into retail shops. The Council Chamber where Clark and Guerra stood trial is now Christophes hairdressers.

When his statement was taken, Clark said that 'I know I am guilty of the rape but I know I didn't murder her.'

Part of the policy of the United States authorities in such cases was that justice must be seen to be done, and where possible trials were held in the town where the crime had occurred. In this case the General Court-Martial was held in Ashford Council Chamber on September 22 and fully reported in the Press. (This policy was taken a stage further after the invasion for crimes committed in France and the execution was carried out on temporary gallows erected in the village concerned.)

Found guilty, Corporal Clark was sentenced to death as was Private Guerra for aiding and abetting the crime, the executions taking place at Shepton Mallet on January 8, 1945.

A field at Killycolpy and another dreadful sexually-motivated murder — the second crime in 1944 committed by air force personnel.

PRIVATE WILLIAM HARRISON

In September another airman, Private William Harrison serving with the 2nd Combat Crew Replacement Center Group in Northern Ireland, where new crews were formed and trained together before being posted to operational squadrons in England, committed the most dastardly crime of all. He had become friendly with the Wylie family in Killycolpy near Stewartstown in County Tyrone, and while visiting the house on September 25, asked permission to take their 7½-year-old daughter Patricia to buy some drinks for Mr Wylie who 'had been so nice to him'. En route to the local shop Harrison betrayed the trust shown to him, and took the little girl into a field where he sexually assaulted and strangled her.

While the General Court-Martial held on November 18 found him guilty, it unusually sentenced him 'in such manner as the reviewing authority may direct to suffer death'. At the direction of the JAG Board of Review, the court reconvened on December 2, revoked its former sentence, and sentenced Harrison to be hanged, which was carried out at Shepton Mallet on April 7, 1945.

Also by a member of the USAAF, the shooting on the Honingham estate on December 3, 1944. Sir Eric lies in woodland about 300 yards from the Hall.

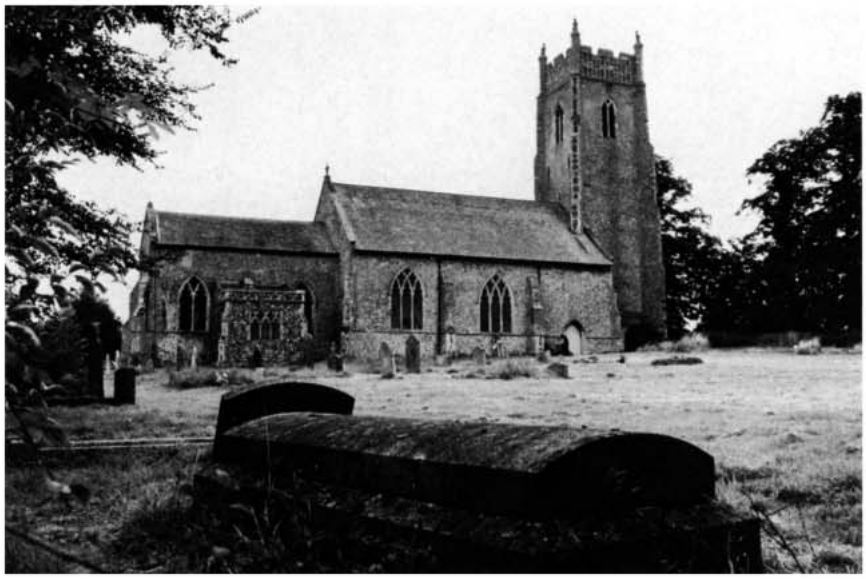
PRIVATE GEORGE E. SMITH

For thirty years Sir Eric Teichman was one of the British Government's foremost civil servants in China. Attached to the Legation in Peking in 1907, by the time he retired he was First Secretary and Counsellor, his long and meritorious service being recognised by his being made a Companion of the Indian Empire in 1919, and in 1927 a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George, being elevated to the rank of Knight Commander in 1933 and Grand Commander of the order in 1944. In 1944 he was living with his wife at Honingham Hall, five miles west of Norwich, Norfolk, which he had purchased when he retired in 1937. Ironically, in view of the manner of his death, his hobby was shooting!

Just north of the estate, near Attlebridge, the RAF had built one of their temporary wartime airfields which they turned over to the American Eighth Army Air Force in 1942, when it became Station 120. In 1944 the 466th Bombardment Group arrived, flying support duties after the invasion to keep the Allied armies supplied with fuel.

On December 3 Sir Eric had just finished his Sunday lunch when he heard shots being fired in the woods close to the house. Informing his wife that he was going to investigate, he set out, unarmed, in the direction from which the noise had come. When Sir Eric did not return for tea, searches began and a call went out to the airfield to ask if any of the men had seen Sir Eric that afternoon. As it was unusual for him not to return from his walks by nightfall, American military police and local constables assembled at the hall and an organised sweep was begun. It was not until midnight that the family dog found his master lying in thick undergrowth about 300 yards from the hall. He had been shot through the head.

Very unusually MPs took Private Smith back to the scene of the crime and reconstructed the murder but, although the photographs were introduced as evidence without protest by the defence, the legal authorities were in conflict as to the admissability of re-enactment photographs. This picture established how Sir Eric could be shot through the right cheek with the bullet ending up below his left shoulder blade.



In a 1890s-vintage hearse drawn by black horses, Sir Eric was borne to his grave in the corner of Honingham Churchyard.

The airfield was immediately sealed and no one was permitted to leave. As the bullet, which was found lodged just under the skin of Sir Eric's back, was identified as having been fired from a ·30 calibre carbine, on the morning of the 4th all weapons on the base were ordered to be surrendered for examination. Each man was interviewed and asked to account for his movements on Sunday afternoon.

On December 5 the US Army Criminal Investigation Department arrived and when it became known that the CID were on the base, one man came forward stating that he had seen Private George Smith of the 784th Bomb Squadron and Private Leonard S. Wojtacha of the 61st Station Complement leave Smith's barracks on Sunday afternoon with carbines in their hands. Meanwhile police had made plaster casts of footprints at the scene of the crime.

The next day two detectives from Scotland Yard arrived and Wojtacha made a full statement. He said that they had left the base about 1.30 p.m. to do some hunting. After proceeding about a quarter of a mile they both fired several rounds at an oil drum in a field. A little further on he said Smith had fired at a cow which then 'started running around with one of its front legs up in the air'. They then entered the woods of the Teichman estate, passed near the house and began firing at a squirrel as it jumped from tree to tree. Smith then suddenly shouted: 'Look out! There's an old man behind you.' Wojtacha said he glanced over his shoulder, and saw Sir Eric about 15 feet away walking forward, carrying a cane.

'Just a minute,' called Sir Eric. 'What are your names?'

Smith replied 'Get back, Pop' and almost simultaneously fired his carbine from the hip. Sir Eric slumped to the ground.

On their way back to barracks, Smith broke off a twig and pushed it into the muzzle of the carbine, Wojtacha thought to clean it, but it snapped off. Smith's carbine 2036239 when examined was found to have been recently fired and it still had a piece of stalk jammed up the barrel.

On December 7, Private Smith was told he would be charged with murder and as he was being warned of his rights he interrupted to say 'I shot him!' He then made a complete written confession and during the afternoon returned with Wojtacha and the investigating officers to the scene of the crime and re-enacted the events of the Sunday afternoon.

The General Court-Martial began in the camp chapel on January 8, 1945 but, although he had fully admitted the killing, Smith then tried to retract his statement and he pleaded not guilty. The trial lasted four days. Much medical evidence was introduced into Smith's background and mental condition at the time of the shooting. Major Leo Alexander, Chief Psychiatric Officer, had examined Smith and he diagnosed his condition as: 'Constitutional psychopathic state, with inadequate and immature personality, emotional instability, schizoid traits, and explosive (poorly repressed) primative-sadistic aggressiveness; severe. Mental deficiency, borderline, mental age nine years. In older psychiatric terminology . . . Mentally defective, homicidal degenerate.'

The defence naturally argued that Smith was insane. His past, none-too-glorious service record was produced, which included six previous courts-martial and, at the time of his induction into the service in August 1942, he was already on parole from the Huntingdon Reformatory, Pennsylvania, the state having agreed to waive the parole supervision during his service in the armed forces although the sentence was due to remain on his file up to December 28, 1948.

The unanimous verdict of guilty from the eleven officers comprising the court came late on the fifth day following a retirement of some 80 minutes.

In their review of the verdict and sentence the Board of Review gave much consideration to the plea of insanity, and Lady Teichman appealed to the 466th headquarters that Smith's life be spared. She also appealed to General Eisenhower and to the US Ambassador in London. All was to no avail; the Board declaring that: 'In the instant case, there is competent evidence that accused was sane, and that he could adhere with difficulty to the right. His ability so to adhere, according to that testimony, was impaired because he had no moral restraint. A powerful restraint to crime, other than moral, is fear of punishment. Those sane persons whose will-power is weakened to the extent of being without conscience, constitute the class who need the latter restraint most. To fail to punish a murderer, whom the court's findings place among that malevolent group who find it hard to do right, is to encourage and not to deter crime.'

Smith kept his appointment with the hangman on VE Day — May 8, 1945.

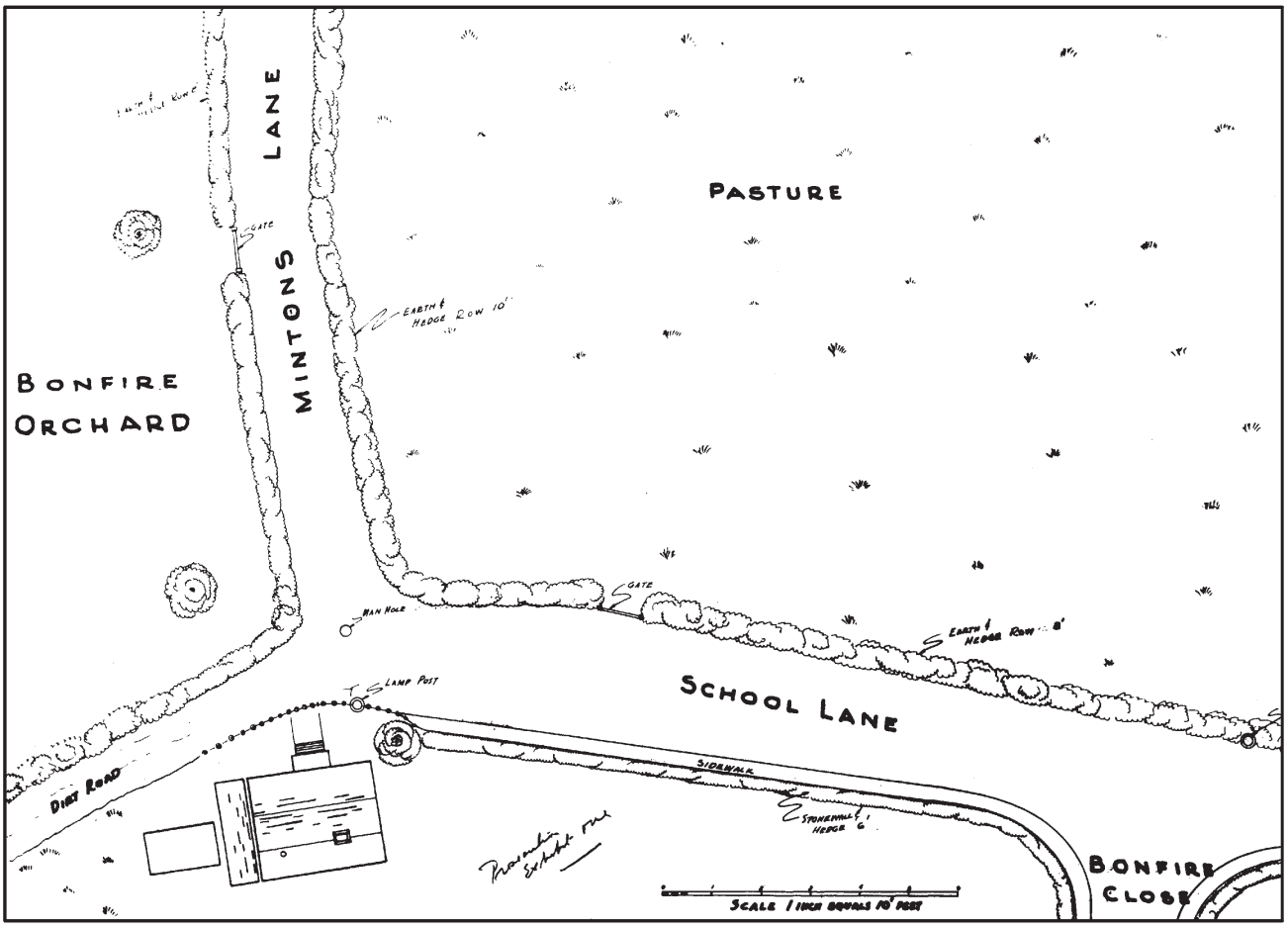
When Bill Pyle showed me the condemned row adjoining the execution chamber (last door on the left) he said he remembered one incident at the end of the war when an American leaning against a cell door asked him if he would shake hands with him. When Bill asked if he was being released, the man replied: 'No they're hanging me tonight.' Although Bill could not remember his name he knew that he had shot someone in Norfolk so I could immediately put a name to the prisoner. I stand in for Smith on the exact spot while the warder in the background reprimands prisoners shut outside while we took the photograph for banging on the door.

CORPORAL ROBERT L. PEARSON
PRIVATE CUBIA JONES

While the search was continuing for Sir Eric on the evening of December 3, Mrs Joyce Brown, married and in the ninth month of pregnancy, was about to leave her home at 12 Bonfire Close in Chard, Somerset. Shortly after 8.00 p.m. she became aware that she was being followed. Turning round, she was confronted by two coloured soldiers who grabbed her wrists and dragged her along the road to a gate leading to Bonfire Orchard. There she was raped by both men at the point of a knife.

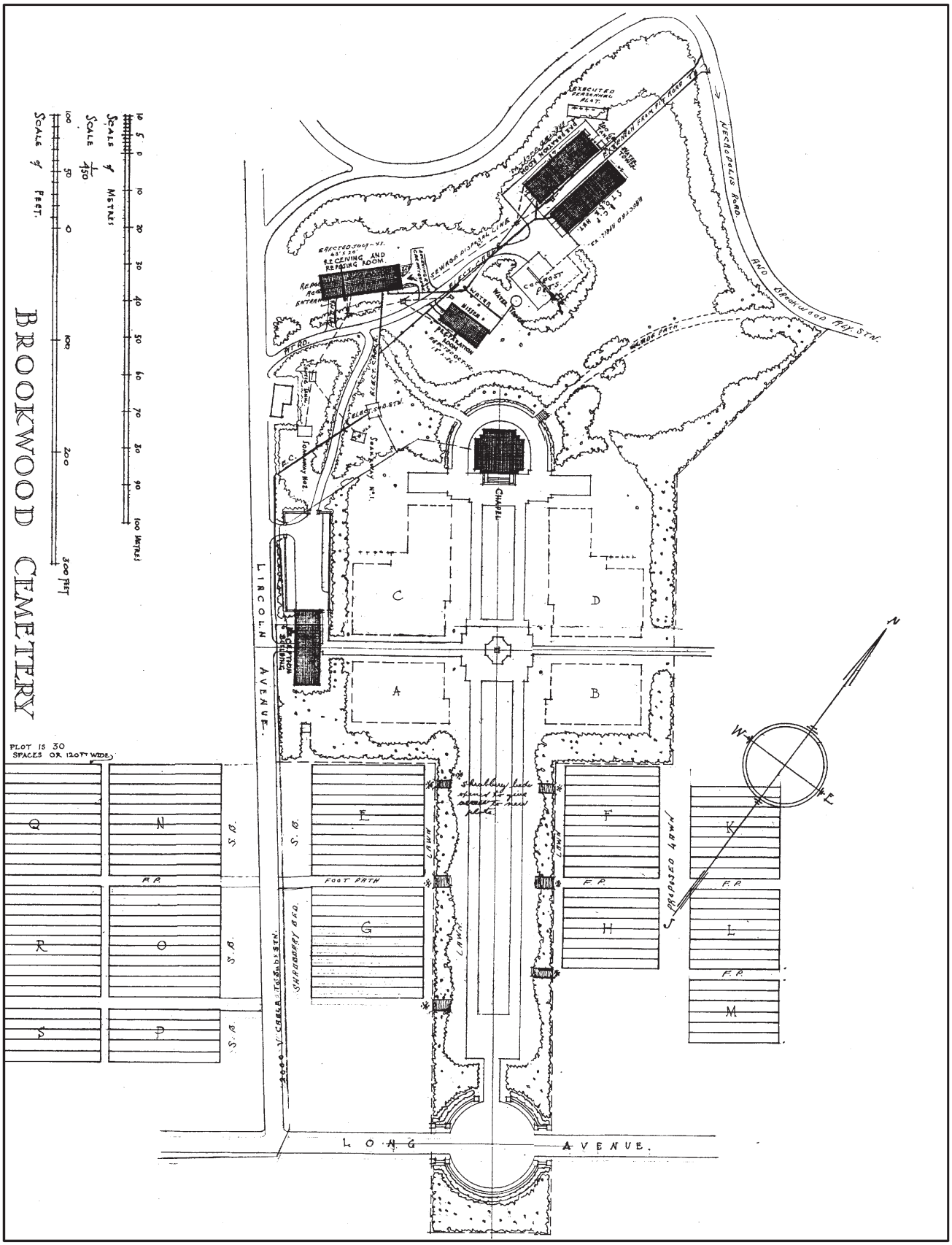
During a clothing search the next day amongst the men of the local American unit, the 1698th Engineer Combat Battalion based at Camp Chard, Private Cubia Jones and Corporal Robert Pearson both had wet and muddy trousers.

Bonfire Close, looking towards School Lane with No. 12 on the left.



At their General Court-Martial held in Chard thirteen days later, both men claimed that intercourse had been with Mrs Broom's consent but there was overwhelming evidence of their guilt from her battered and distressed condition when examined by a doctor. The court brought in verdicts of guilty, the sentence of death being carried out at Shepton on March 17, 1945.

The distance from Mrs Groom's house to where she was attacked is not more than a hundred yards. Now the Mintons Lane on the scene-of-crime plan has become Summerfield Road but the manhole in the centre of the road is unmistakable. Bonfire Orchard itself has completely gone, having been replaced by the Mintons estate. The gate lay more or less in the centre of the second block. The rape at Chard on December 3 was the last crime which resulted in a capital sentence being carried into effect at Shepton Mallet during the war.



The American military went to extreme lengths to avoid any stigma being attached to their honourable dead and to prevent any publicity (as they still do) from attaching itself to those executed for the commission of heinous crimes. Our reasons for presenting this detailed investigation are of historical import only: to cover one aspect of the war which has previously received scant attention, which became only too apparent from the difficulties we encountered during our research. Although we knew that those executed at Shepton Mallet had been buried in 'Plot X' at Brookwood, its location does not appear in any literature and the American Battle Monuments Commission could not enlighten us. It was only after lengthy research in American archives that David Hale was able to unearth this plan for us of the complete wartime layout of the temporary burial ground at Brookwood grouped around the First War cemetery (Plots A, B, C and D). At last the mystery of Plot X was solved, for there it was, hidden away in the woods behind the service area.

PFC Dennis Toomey blows taps at Brookwood in April 1944. The First World War memorial chapel can be seen behind the trees. The ground shown comprising Plots N to S was evacuated by 1948, the area being subsequently used for the concentration of the graves of Italian prisoners of war who had died in Britain.

Thus ended one of the seamier sides of World War II, an aspect which until now has largely been overlooked, but the grieving families of those killed and the mentally-scarred victims of violent assault are casualties of war nonetheless. Wherever men do battle, women suffer, and as the armies swept across France and into Belgium and Holland in 1944, all the Allies were guilty of excesses, including Britain. That this survey has concentrated on American servicemen who erred in the UK must not be considered indicative of anything more than the fact that American records of their troops' transgressions overseas are freely available whereas here the authorities choose to lock away such sordid details and all court-martial records are closed to inspection. (British servicemen committing crimes within the UK of course were dealt with by civil courts and we have covered instances of such in the past — *see After the Battle Nos. 37 and 45.*)

In his winding up report in 1946, the Judge Advocate General recorded that 'the history of sex offenses in the European Theater during this war is essentialy a story of human tragedy and sordidness, of violence and lust, yet a story that seems to be re-enaced to some degree in every war. Considering these offenses en masse, they might at first seem to constitute a serious blot upon the record of the American Army; but, comparing the number of cases with the total number of men engaged in what was perhaps the greatest human project of all time, and allowing for the unnatural and extreme conditions in which many of them were placed, the record seems less black or even better than could normally have been expected.'

At a period when a million and a half Americans were based in Britain, the level of murder, or homicide, was considered not unduly high. The Judge Advocate General believed that 'probably the majority of the murders committed in this Theater were not significantly different from the murders which take place in the civilian community. It was virtually inevitable that an army as large as ours, representing a cross-section of the country as a whole, would contain some criminal, vicious or maladjusted individuals. It was just as inevitable that certain of these men, by reason of their own inherent propensities, by reason of human frailty in its various manifestations, and by reason of the whole complex of factors which normally produces crime, would commit murder or voluntary manslaughter. While ready access to firearms and the general tensions of wartime living may have increased to some degree the incidence of murders of this general type, it is felt that in the last analysis these murders were simply those which might have been expected to have been committed by certain individuals in any large group.

One final episode remains to be told. Normally in England, executed criminals are interred within the prison walls but, in the case of the Americans at Shepton Mallet, this was not the case.

On January 14, 1942, the Adjutant General in Washington sought permission from the American Battle Monuments Commission to bury any personnel of the Armed Forces who might die in England in the American cemetery which had been established after the First World War at Brookwood in Surrey. This contained 468 dead from that war and had been fully landscaped as a permanent resting place. General John J. Pershing, renowned First War commander and then Chairman of the ABMC, replied in the affirmative on January 24. Initially the empty spaces in existing rows were used, the first burial on April 8 being Grave 11 of Row 7 in Plot C for Warren H. Irwin of the US Navy. All five spaces in this row were filled that Spring, together with five in Row 7 of Plot D on the opposite side of the memorial chapel. As time went on it was obvious that a more lasting solution had to be found, and additional ground was acquired in July 1942 for a new Plot E designed to hold 250 graves.

Administrative control of the cemetery was vested in the US Military Attaché but in September 1942 this was transferred to the Commanding General for Services of Supply for the European Theater. At this time most of the casualties were caused by aircraft crashes but the pace was such that fourteen new graves were opened that month alone. Additional plots were added, lettered up to S, and by 1944 Brookwood contained 3,633 American dead.

On August 31, 1944 the cemetery was closed to further burials, which were then continued at Cambridge, which had been activated on December 7, 1943 and was better situated to cater for the increasing number of fatalities suffered by the Eighth Air Force in carrying the air offensive to Germany.

Up until 1943 the problem of how to dispose of the bodies of executed general prisoners had not had to be faced but when Private Cobb was hung on March 12 it was decided that a specially designated area — Plot X — should be established at Brookwood well away from prying eyes where there would be no risk of tarnishing the honour of those in the main burial ground. The spot chosen lay in the forest land where temporary buildings had been erected near the compost heap behind the WWI chapel.

By the end of the war it contained the remains of the 19 dead transported the 100 miles from Somerset, the burials continuing long after the main cemetery had been closed in August 1944.

When it was decided after the war to establish the permanent American World War II cemetery in the British Isles at Cambridge, exhumations from the main burial area at Brookwood commenced early in 1948 and were completed by the end of May. At a conference of the American Graves Registration Command held in AGRC HQ in Paris on March 16, 1948 it was instructed that 'all exhumations [were] to include those from the general prisoner plot . . . the excavations to be well back-filled by AGRC and tamped in order to minimize future settlement.' The 19 graves were opened on May 26 and by July the whole of the temporary cemetery had been evacuated, the ground smoothed off and restoration of the First World War cemetery completed.

The following year American executed dead were gathered from all over Europe and interred in a special 'dishonoured' plot *(see After the Battle No. 32)* which was established in a walled-off area of the First World War cemetery at Oise-Aisne in France.

The end of a ten-year project for me — the old Plot X.

'Vote "yes" for a free Austria'. With Kurt von Schuschnigg and his Vaterländischen Front. Four weeks later the same hoardings called for a 'Ja' vote for Hitler's Greater Germany. In his last public proclamation, Dr Schuschnigg announced that 'President Miklas asks me to tell the people of Austria that we have yielded to force since we are not prepared in this terrible situation to shed blood . . .' He was imprisoned by the Germans and not freed until 1945. After the war he became a professor at St Louis University, Missouri, became an American citizen in 1956 and died in November 1977.

50 YEARS AGO

In 1938 Austria was just 20 years old. Formed out of the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of the First War, the coming to power of Hitler in 1933 led to an increasingly vociferous campaign for Anschluss (union) with Germany. In 1934 civil war broke out between the Social Democrats and the authoritarian government of Englebert Dollfuss and, although the uprising was crushed after four days, five months later Dollfuss was murdered after a group of Nazis seized the Chancellery. This attempt to install a Nazi Government also failed and the new Austrian Chancellor, Dr Kurt von Schuschnigg, was assured by Hitler that 'Germany neither intends nor wishes to interfere in the internal affairs of Austria, to annex Austria or to conclude an Anschluss.'

Italy had historically always been aligned with Austria but when Mussolini allied himself with Hitler in 1936, the 39-year-old Austrian leader realised that a formal agreement with the German dictator was the only insurance policy possible to try and preserve his county's independence. In the Austro-German agreement signed in July 1936, Germany reaffirmed its recognition of Austrian sovereignty and assurance not to interfere; in return Austria had to promise to conduct its foreign policy on the principle that it was a German state. Secret clauses also allowed an amnesty for Nazi political prisoners and the appointing of representatives to positions of political responsibility.

This agreement to allow a Nazi element in Austria led to a terror campaign of bombings and demonstrations throughout 1937, and a police raid in January 1938 uncovered plans for an outright revolt that Spring.

In order to sort out with the Austrian Chancellor 'such misunderstandings and points of friction as have persisted' since the 1936 agreement was signed, Hitler invited von Schuschnigg to the Obersalzberg for talks. The meeting on February 12 was not so much a discussion as a tirade by Hitler and an ultimatum that the Austrian government be turned over to German control within a week with the installation of Dr Seyss-Inquart as Minister of the Interior. Browbeaten into submission with threats of massive military intervention if he wavered, von Schuschnigg signed.

The next four weeks marked the political and economic decline which ensued as inflammatory speeches, demonstrations, and acts of violence struck an Austria bereft of any sign of the support of the major powers.

In a last-minute effort to forestall the Nazis, on Wednesday, March 9 von Schuschnigg produced his trump card: he would appeal direct to the country in a referendum, asking for a simple 'Ja' or 'Nein' for or against union with Germany, in much the same way as General de Gaulle asked for support for his policies in post-war France.

With the slogan Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Führer, the wanderer returns to his homeland. This is the Hotel Tyrol in Innsbruck. Heinrich Hoffmann followed his idol during his election tour of Austria and the photographs certainly show a rapturous reception.

The Tiroler Hotel was destroyed in 1944, rebuilt in the 1950s only to close in 1972. Now the block has been split up into offices, flats, shops and a bank.

It is April 9, 1938 — the eve of Hitler's Anschluss poll — and with newsreel cameras covering him from front and rear, a triumphant moment as he crosses the Staatsbrücke between the Altstadt and Neustadt in Salzburg.

A plebiscite was something that Hitler could not allow and the unexpected news sent the Führer into a fit of rage. With voting day announced as Sunday, March 13 — four days hence — Hitler issued immediate orders for the military occupation of Austria by Saturday. This was followed by a demand to von Schuschnigg that he must cancel the arrangements for the vote and resign.

Under the excuse of preventing further bloodshed — which German newspapers headlined 'German Austria Saved from Chaos' — German troops crossed the frontier at daybreak on Sunday March 12.

The tumultuous welcome accorded Hitler when he entered his native land led to the Nazis announcing that their own plebiscite on the union with Germany would be held on April 10. Hitler spent much of the next four weeks on an election tour throughout Austria and, when the results of the vote were announced, it was declared that 99·75 per cent had voted 'Ja' in Austria and 99·08 per cent in Germany.

Thus the fait accompli was complete. Austria became part of Greater Germany, the name 'Österreich' being banished and replaced by the name 'Ostmark'. Apart from the virtually bloodless takeover of the country without any interference from Britain, France or the Soviet Union, the successful outcome reassured Hitler that he could stretch his wings even further afield with impunity.

Our comparison of the widened bridge taken on a Sunday is not typical — normally it is crowded with traffic.